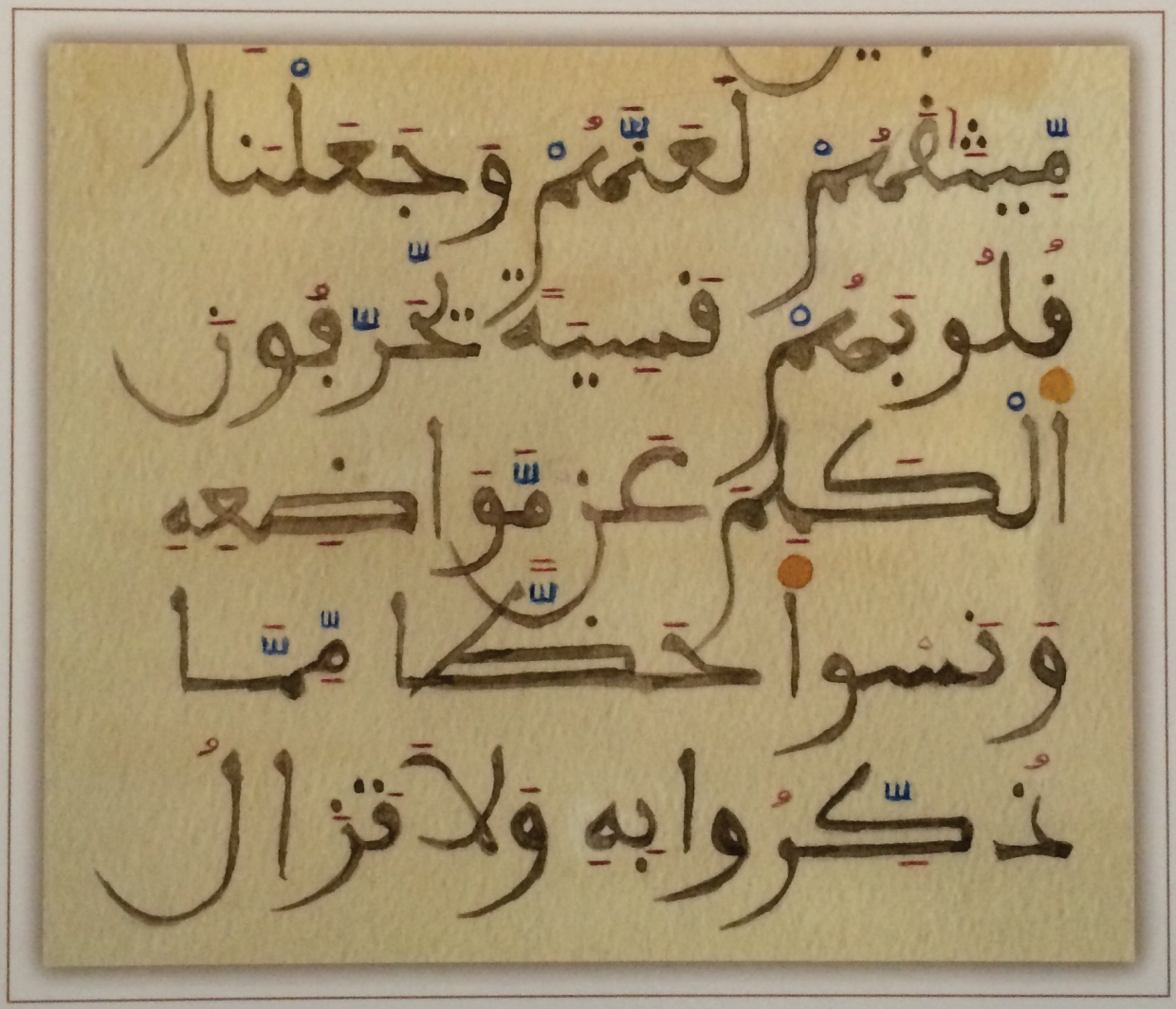
THE WELL-TRAVELLED QUR'AN

A CELEBRATION OF THE ENDURANCE OF *KALAM ALLAH*



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LUQMAN NAGY

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التى سفرت كثيراً في الأندلس و اِفريقية.
(باللغة الإنجليزية)

The Noble Qur'an is كلام الله (*Kalam Allah*), the eternal message, preserved forever, for all humanity. Allah's Word was revealed, for the last time, to the final Messenger, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

Within two centuries of the founding of the Islamic state, Muslims had spread the message of *Din al-Haq* east to the borders of China, and west to Spain and the shores of the Atlantic. The secret of Chinese papermaking, first passed on to the Muslims in Baghdad, created an 'information explosion' that reverberated throughout *Dar al-Islam*. Inexpensive paper permitted the dissemination of *Kalam Allah* and, eventually, the transcription of hundreds of thousands of *ahadith*. The Islamic world soon developed a creative and literate culture of high civilization.

This story chronicles the nine hundred year long odyssey of a beautiful handwritten Qur'an produced in Cordoba in the 11th century. The plight of the *Moriscos* (Arabic *Al-Muriskiyyun*), the last Muslims of Al-Andalus, becomes an integral part of the amazing story of the well-travelled Qur'an.

DARUSSALAM
GLOBAL LEADER IN ISLAMIC BOOKS

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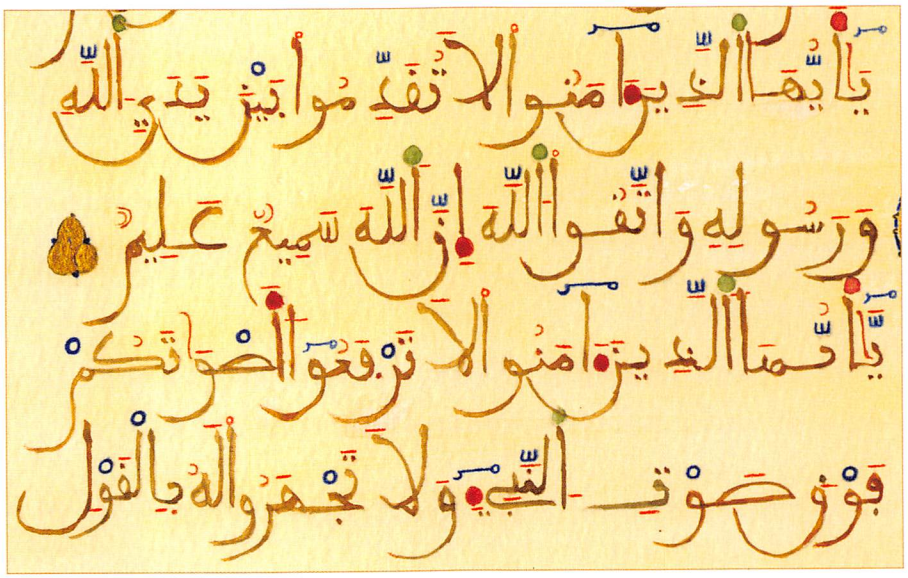

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INTRODUCTION

Historians have been adept at choosing specific dates in history and labeling them as 'important'. These are the dates highlighted in school history textbooks and the ones we remember all our lives. Examples include 1066 (Battle of Hastings), 1492 (Columbus' Voyage to the Americas), and 1903 (Wright Brothers' First Airplane Flight). But, some historical events are clearly more momentous than others. For example, everyone would agree that Babur's entry into India in 1521, or the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 were historically more significant than Nadir Shah's theft of the Peacock Throne in 1739, or the erection of the Eiffel Tower in Paris in 1889.

Our story here begins with a little known battle, but one which had momentous consequences. The battle itself took place in 751, in an extremely remote part of Central Asia, along the banks of the Talas River. It is significant as it represents the sole confrontation between the Islamic ('Abbasid) and Chinese (Tang) Empires. The Muslim victory ensured that Islam would forever have an important presence in the region, eventually replacing Buddhism, Manichaeism, and Zoroastrianism.

The spoils of the Battle of Talas included Chinese captives who knew the secret of papermaking. For centuries, Europe, western Asia and Egypt had used laborious and expensive methods to produce useful writing surfaces. While the Egyptians monopolized the manufacture of papyrus sheets, Europe and western Asia invented a very different writing surface called parchment: stretched, scraped and dried calfskin or goatskin.

Paper had been used by the Chinese for centuries. Once the Arabs learned the secret of this revolutionary new material, an inexpensive and easily manufactured writing surface was assured. This was indeed a blessing for the nascent Islamic Empire as paper provided the ideal medium for the dissemination of *Kalam Allah*, the final message for humanity revealed to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the final Messenger of Allah to humanity.

In the Noble Qur'an, Allah clearly states the purpose of the Prophet's ﷺ mission:

الٓرۚ كِتَٰبٌ أَنزَلۡنَٰهُ إِلَيۡكَ لِتُخۡرِجَ ٱلنَّاسَ مِنَ ٱلظُّلُمَٰتِ إِلَى ٱلنُّورِ بِإِذۡنِ رَبِّهِمۡ إِلَىٰ صِرَٰطِ ٱلۡعَزِيزِ ٱلۡحَمِيدِ ١ إبراهيم: ١

([This is] a Book which We have revealed unto you [O Muhammad ﷺ] in order that you might lead mankind out of darkness [of disbelief and polytheism] into light [of belief in the Oneness of Allah and Islamic monotheism] by their Lord's Leave to the Path of the All-Mighty, the Owner of all praise.) *Ibrahim*: 1

قُلْ يَٰٓأَهْلَ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ تَعَالَوْا۟ إِلَىٰ كَلِمَةٍ سَوَآءٍۭ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا ٱللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِۦ شَيْـًٔا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا مِّن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ ۚ فَإِن تَوَلَّوْا۟ فَقُولُوا۟ ٱشْهَدُوا۟ بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ ﴿٦٤﴾ آل عمران: ٦٤

(Say [O Muhammad ﷺ]: 'O People of the Scripture [Jews and Christians]: Come to a word that is just between us and you, that we worship none but Allah [Alone], and that we associate no partners with Him, and that none of us shall take others as lords besides Allah.' Then, if they turn away, say: 'Bear witness that we are Muslims.') *Âl-'Imrân*: 64

Papermaking spread westwards from Baghdad and within two centuries had reached all the major capitals of *Dar al-Islam*, including far-off Al-Andalus (Muslim Spain). Inexpensive paper fueled an 'information explosion' that encouraged literacy throughout the Islamic world. While the largest monastic library in Christian Europe might have had several dozen heavy parchment books as its entire collection, even public libraries in Al-Andalus housed thousands of lightweight paper books.

The first paper mill in Europe was established in Spain. Book markets there offered beautiful copies of the Noble Qur'an and soon every Muslim family owned one. Mosques and *madrasahs* became important centres of learning, some of which offered the best education available in western *Dar al-Islam*.

Our story chronicles the odyssey of one 11th century Qur'an from Cordoba -- beautifully handwritten in the traditional *andalusī* script. Although this copy of *Kitab Allah* was written during the final days of the Spanish caliphate, no one could have foreseen the horrendous events that would befall the Muslims of Al-Andalus in succeeding centuries. The little known history of the *Moriscos* (the Spanish Muslims forcibly converted to Christianity, but who still professed belief in لا إله إلا الله محمد رسول الله) is the vehicle through which the author narrates the amazing story of the well-travelled Qur'an.

The Noble Qur'an is *Kalam Allah*, the eternal message, preserved forever, for all humanity. The story told here of the well-travelled Qur'an celebrates the endurance of *Kalam Allah*.

Insha'Allah, readers will enjoy and benefit from this inspiring story.

To you all, my warm salaams.

Luqman Nagy
Dhahran, Saudi Arabia
May 2009

Chapter One

Of all the religious books in the world, the Noble Qur'an is unique in that it alone professes to be *Kalam Allah*, the unadulterated 'Word of Allah', the Creator. In *Surah Al-An'am*: 7, Allah reminds us that as the Qur'an was being revealed to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, it was subsequently written down on 'paper' (Arabic قرطاس), or in fact papyrus, as paper was unknown to the peoples of the Middle East in the 7th century C.E.[1]

وَلَوْ نَزَّلْنَا عَلَيْكَ كِتَٰبًا فِى قِرْطَاسٍ فَلَمَسُوهُ بِأَيْدِيهِمْ لَقَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوٓا۟ إِنْ هَٰذَآ إِلَّا سِحْرٌ مُّبِينٌ ﴿٧﴾ الأنعام: ٧

(And even if we had sent down unto you [O Muhammad ﷺ] a Message written on paper so that they could touch it with their hands, the disbelievers would have said, 'This is nothing but obvious magic!')

During the lifetime of Abu Bakr Al-Saddiq رضي الله عنه, the first Righteous Caliph (632-634), the entire Qur'an was preserved for the first time on square sheets of papyrus. 'Uthman ibn 'Affan رضي الله عنه, the third Righteous Caliph (644-656), had several copies of the Qur'an prepared on parchment (stretched and dried animal skin) and sent to the major capitals of *Dar al-Islam* where they were preserved and copied yet again.

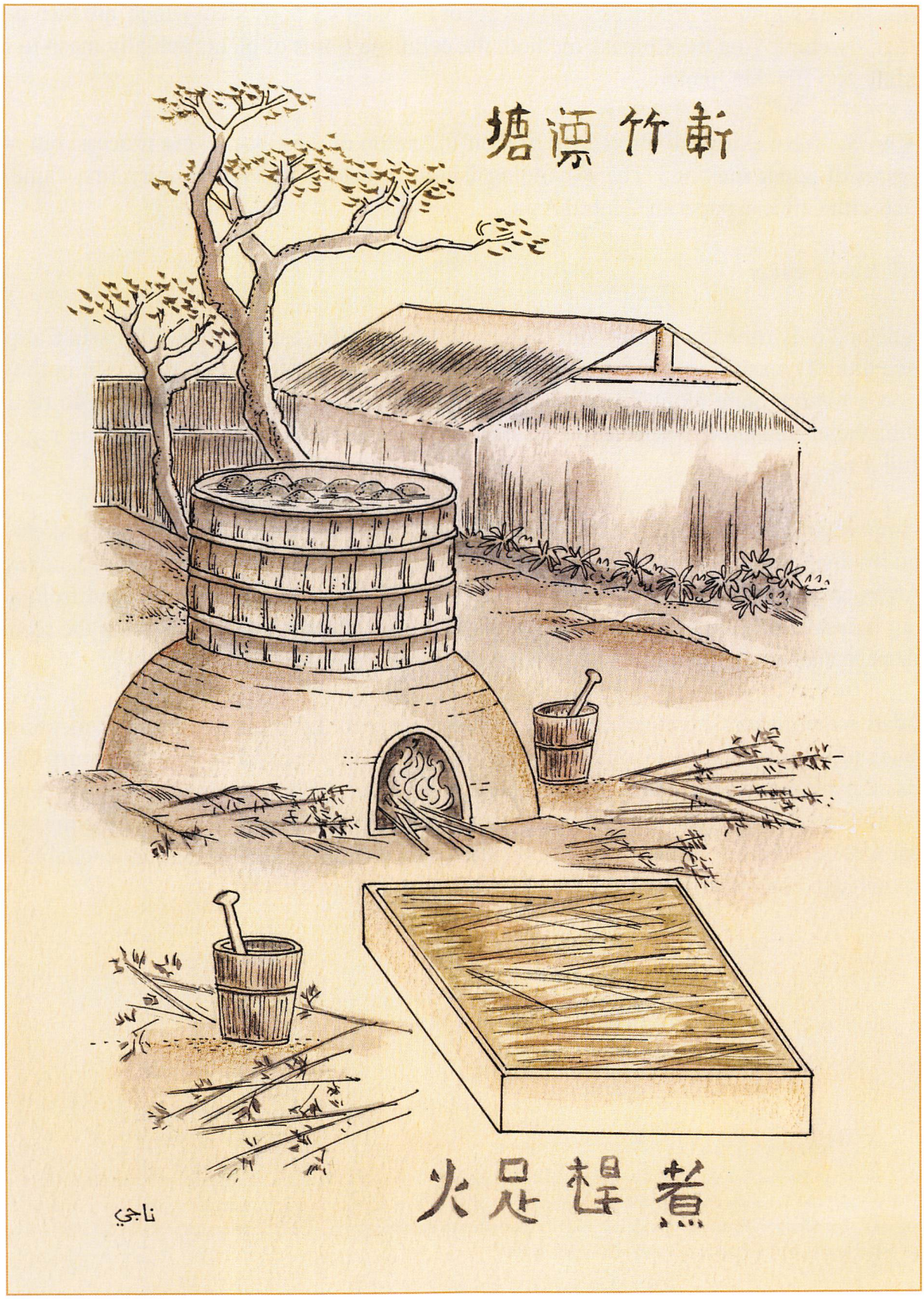
Over the centuries, many beautiful styles of writing the Arabic language were developed. Even today, an educated Arab is often familiar with several calligraphic styles, such as *ruq'ah*, *naskh*, and *thuluth*, etc. The Noble Qur'an continued to be hand-written on specially-prepared sheets of papyrus and parchment and -- even after the invention of the printing press in 1450 -- on paper. The first extant copy of a printed Qur'an is from Venice, Italy and dates from 1537-1538. It was mass produced for sale throughout the Ottoman Empire, but a multitude of printing errors prevented it from ever being sold.

Chinese Paper

The history of paper is fascinating and important as its manufacture in the Islamic world heralded an information explosion enabling the inexpensive copying of the Noble Qur'an and collections of *ahadith*.

Paper had its origin in China two thousand years ago. The complex process of making paper begins with the extraction of cellulose fibres from plants, such as bamboo, mulberry bark, hemp, or even cotton rags. The fibres are then beaten to a pulp in water and suspended there until a layer of the material can be skimmed off the surface and placed on a screen to dry. Unlike

[1] All dates in this book are Gregorian dates according to the Christian calendar and will not be followed by the abbreviation C.E. ('Common Era').



Paper had its origin in China two thousand years ago. The complex process of making paper began with the extraction of cellulose fibres from plants, such as bamboo and mulberry bark.

papyrus sheets which are produced from slivers of the plant's woody stem which are then pasted together, by employing the Chinese method, the cellulose fibres of plants actually mesh to form a durable and flexible 'paper'.[2]

The Chinese were extremely protective of their invention of the silk-making process, but not of the secret of paper making. The expanding Islamic world of the 8th century first came into contact with Chinese paper in Central Asia.

The Battle of Talas

The one and only time the Islamic and Chinese worlds -- represented by the 'Abbasid Caliphate and the Tang Dynasty respectively -- confronted each other on the battle field was in the year 751, on a remote plain alongside the Talas River (in present-day Kyrgyzstan). The resultant Muslim victory ensured a permanent Islamic presence and influence in this Turkic region of Central Asia.

One important by-product of the Battle of Talas was the capture of Chinese papermakers who gradually divulged the secret of paper-making to eager Arab entrepreneurs. From Samarqand, the Arabs carried the technology south to Baghdad, where it was further developed from an art into an industry. Unlike all other writing surfaces, paper absorbs ink, thus making the recorded words permanent and, therefore, less likely to be forged.

Baghdad papermakers invented a thicker sheet of paper that proved ideal for meeting the demands of the information explosion taking place there. By the end of the 8th century CE, the 'Abbasid capital city boasted the liveliest papermaking and book manuscript copying centre in the Islamic world. Inexpensive and readily available paper had helped create a literate society almost without rival in the history of Islam. This was a society that had an unquenchable thirst for knowledge contained in books as we know them.

[2] The Chinese were also the first to invent paper money in the 8th century. It was initially called 'flying money' because of its light weight. Both Marco Polo, the Venetian explorer, and Ibn Battutah, the world traveller from Tangiers, mention paper money in their *Rihlahs* (travelogues). The Mongol Ilkhans of Iran unsuccessfully attempted to introduce a Chinese-type paper currency in the late 13th century. The first paper money in the West was issued in Sweden in 1661.

Chapter Two

Despite the popularity of the Internet, promises of the 'paperless office', and the latest developments in electronic book technology, paper is still an indispensable commodity in our daily lives and one rarely pauses to think of what life would be like without it.

The discovery of papermaking by the Arabs in the 8th century and the subsequent establishment of paper mills in Samarqand and Baghdad were truly momentous events in the history of mankind. It is no surprise, therefore, that Baghdad's paper markets were the catalyst that sparked off one of the greatest 'information explosions' in history. The mass production of paper and its popularity enabled world civilization to evolve.

Faith develops man spiritually, but knowledge is what fosters his intellectual development. Muslims have always been encouraged to seek knowledge and Allah, Himself, equates knowledge with 'great wealth' in this *ayah*:

يُؤْتِي ٱلْحِكْمَةَ مَن يَشَآءُ ۚ وَمَن يُؤْتَ ٱلْحِكْمَةَ فَقَدْ أُوتِيَ خَيْرًا كَثِيرًا ۗ - البقرة: ٢٦٩

> (He grants *Hikmah* ['wisdom', i.e., knowledge and understanding of the Qur'an and *Sunnah*] to whom He wills and he to whom *Hikmah* is granted, is indeed granted abundant good.) *Surah Al-Baqarah*: 269.

And according to Abu Hurayrah ﵁, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, said:

> The word of wisdom is the lost property of the believer, so wherever he finds it, he has a better right to it. (*Sunan al-Tirmidhi*: 2611; *Ibn Majah*: 4159)

Baghdad, the new 'Abbasid capital, was an impressive city in the early 9th century. It was unquestionably the most cosmopolitan city in the world -- outside of China. Only Greek Byzantium (Constantinople) could attempt to rival its riches. Scholars from east and west met in the *Bayt al-Hikmah*[3] whose goal was to preserve the canon of classical Greek science in the new world language: Arabic. The city's streets teemed with people speaking many foreign tongues: Greek, Aramaic, Persian and Indian dialects.

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[3] The *Bayt al-Hikmah*, or 'House of Wisdom', was an academy founded in Baghdad in 830 by the 'Abbasid caliph Al-Ma'mun. Translators worked non-stop in producing Arabic versions of long lost, or forgotten, Greek scientific texts as well as works in Syriac, Pahlavi and Sanskrit.

One of the busiest markets in 9th century Baghdad was the *Suq al-Warraqin*, the 'Stationers' Market', where more than a hundred shops offered a revolutionary new product: paper.

Suq a-Warraqin

Baghdad's markets were bursting at their seams; the wealth of the Islamic Empire was clearly on display. One of the busiest markets of all was the *Suq al-Warraqin*, the 'Stationers' Market', where more than a hundred shops offered a revolutionary new product: paper.

The paper dealers, the *warraqun*, were a devoted and professional group who performed many functions in addition to selling paper. Books were transcribed and also bound. Many of the first *warraqun* were scholars or members of the *'ulema*, who were well-versed in the Qur'an and *ahadith*. Indeed, it was with the advent of inexpensive paper that *ahadith* were first committed to writing. Until this period, *ahadith* had been preserved solely via oral transmission. With the establishment of *madrasah*[4] education in the 11th century, the *'ulema* no longer needed to augment their income working in the *Suq al-Warraqin*.

The quality of paper offered for sale improved when linen fibres were substituted for wood and bamboo. Many different types of paper were available, but the standard 'Baghdadi' sheet measuring 30" by 40" was the most popular. Such paper was even appreciated by the Byzantine Greeks, who were avid purchasers.

The abundance of inexpensive paper[5] helped to increase literacy. All kinds of new reading material were available and some schools even supplied free paper to their pupils. Cook books, travel books and tomes of exotic tales all became best sellers.

Baghdad was the inheritor of the vast pre-Islamic Sasanian Persian Empire. The 'Abbasids adopted many administrative policies the Persians had employed and one of these was the Sasanian practice of meticulous record keeping. The *warraqun*, consequently, supplied reams (Arabic *rizmah*, 'bundle') of paper to the 'Abbasid state.

Many *warraqun* were active manuscript copyists and were involved in translation. Others permitted their customers to read the books they had in stock, thus acting like private research libraries. In many ways, they resembled the very best bookshops of today that offer their patrons comfortable reading areas and even free refreshments!

These were exceptional times in the history of world civilization. While books were being translated faster than ever before, Muslim scientists were also making original contributions to human knowledge. Al-Khwarizmi, for example, synthesized the Hindu concept of reckoning

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[4] Nizam al-Mulk (died 1092), the Persian vizier of the Seljuq ruler Malik Shah of Isfahan, established some of the first true *madrasahs* (the *Nizamiyyah* colleges) throughout Seljuq territory in the late 11th century.

[5] Paper was much less expensive than papyrus or parchment. Many Qur'ans had been written on parchment, but this was very impractical for the mass production of books. It has been estimated, for example, that the skins of three hundred sheep were needed to produce one hand-written bible!

using numerals. His groundbreaking work, *Al-Maqalah fi Hisab al-Jabr wa-l-Muqabilah*, written in Baghdad around the year 825, made the term 'algebra' a household word while the author himself is immortalized in the term 'algorithm'. Mathematical calculations using the new 'Arabic numerals' could now be completed on paper, thus eliminating the need for the cumbersome 'finger-reckoning'.

The Paper Trail

It took several centuries for the secret of papermaking to reach Europe. But the thirst for knowledge was so great in *Dar al-Islam* that paper mills had been established in Damascus by the year 800. A century later, Fustat (and later Cairo) had replaced its once lucrative papyrus (Arabic *qirtas*) monopoly with paper production. This, incidentally, coincided with the foundation of one of the first *madrasahs* -- the Al-Azhar Mosque/University -- by the Fatimid caliphs. The famous Persian traveller, Nasir-i Khusraw, was present in Cairo in 985 and relates seeing Egyptian shopkeepers offering free paper bags for their customers' convenience.

Other seats of Islamic learning in North Africa also became papermaking centres. By the 11th century, Qayrawan (in Tunisia) and Fez (in Morocco) were both manufacturing paper to meet the growing demand for private libraries.

By the end of the 11th century, papermakers crossed over the Strait of Gibraltar and arrived in Al-Andalus, Muslim Spain. The first paper mill in Europe was established at Játiva (or Xátiva), a town close to Valencia (Arabic *Madinah Balansiya*). With such a ready supply of paper available, the large Muslim population of Spain could now finally access dozens of public libraries that acquired copies of all new books being produced. Copyists would also now be able to meet the popular demand for Qur'ans and collections of *ahadith*.

The spread of papermaking follows a distinct crescent-shaped path from Central Asia to Al-Andalus. The fact that this path kept within the borders of *Dar al-Islam* is no surprise.[6] Muslims heeded the commands of both Allah and His Messenger ﷺ, by seeking knowledge wherever it might be. While Al-Andalus soon boasted outstanding private and public libraries containing unique and sizeable holdings, it would have been impossible to find one comparable library in all of the rest of Europe.[7]

Al-Andalus, with its literate book-loving population of Christians, Jews and Muslims, became a beacon which soon attracted seekers of knowledge from well beyond its border.

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[6] Europe knew of paper once it had reached Spain, but was reluctant to use it extensively because of its 'Muslim' origin. Of course, wealthy cattle and sheep owners also had vested interests in the continued production of parchment. At one time, the Holy Roman Emperor himself declared all official documents written on paper to be invalid. However, with the introduction of the printing press in the mid-fifteenth century, European attitudes towards paper changed.

[7] In medieval times, the few literate Europeans were mainly the resident monks in monasteries. They laboured long and hard to produce heavy hand-written, illuminated parchment bibles. But while a monastery might have treasured a few dozen such tomes, the libraries of Al-Andalus could boast of thousands of new paper books.

Chapter Three

We have seen why the use of paper was disfavoured by the Christian world who saw it as a symbol of Muslim culture. So, while the rest of Europe continued the labour-intensive production of parchment and languished in ignorance, Muslim Spain, along with the rest of *Dar al-Islam*, advanced by embracing the new technology and the culture of the book.

Játiva Paper

The relatively small Spanish town of Játiva (Xátiva; Arabic *Shatiba*) became the centre of papermaking in Al-Andalus. Papermakers there had mastered their trade in Morocco. The papermaking process involved first using flax or cotton fibres -- from scraps of old cloth or rags -- which were soaked (fermented), washed, pounded, bleached in quicklime, and then finally dried in molds. Cotton fibres and a steady supply of water -- the raw materials of Játiva paper -- were in abundance, so the Spanish mills were soon producing a very high quality product.[8]

Játiva paper, whose texture and finish could be compared to that produced by modern technology, was in demand all over Al-Andalus. It was lightweight, inexpensive and much more durable than other materials. Paper could also easily absorb all types of ink and pigments. The 'information explosion', begun in Baghdad two centuries before, was now radically changing Spanish society. Arabic was no longer the language of a small ruling elite, but had become the medium of Islamic culture and learning. The *Suq al-Warraqin*, the 'Stationers' Market', was also a feature of all Andalusian cities, where local scribes avidly copied the Qur'an and *ahadith* for the book-loving Muslims of Spain.

Scribes, professional calligraphers, were in great demand throughout Al-Andalus. Their skills had been perfected by years of rigorous training. A fresh, blank sheet of Játiva paper could be transformed in their hands into a magnificent work of art; a single *ayah* from the Noble Qur'an, deftly written in *andalusī*, the exquisite local style of handwriting, truly honoured and did justice to *Kalam Allah*, the glorious Word of Allah.

Calligraphy and Calligraphers

Calligraphy (Arabic, *khat al-jamil*), the artful mastery of beautiful handwriting, has always been given a place of honour in Islam; it is the highest art form as figurative art is forbidden.

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[8] Játiva paper, because of its superior quality -- its colour, thickness, and finish -- became so famous that even today, the same type of paper is known in Morocco as *shatibi*.

This page is from a magnificent Qur'an written nine hundred years ago on bright yellow Játiva paper by a calligrapher who lived in the city of Cordoba, the jewel of Al-Andalus. (last *ayah* of *Surah Al-Fath* and first *ayahs* of *Surah Al-Hujurat*)

Practitioners of the art, known as calligraphers, developed hand-writing styles in Arabic that are still in use today.[9]

Professional calligraphers were specially trained. The reed pen (Arabic, *qalam*) was their preferred tool. As apprentices, they would be taught how to select the ideal cane from the reed bed; how to cut and transform it into a writing instrument; and even how to hold it when writing. The most serious and sincere calligraphers would also employ special breathing exercises to help them hold their reed pens steady.

Every aspect of the art of calligraphy would have to be mastered before the novice could be granted his *ijazah* (diploma), which would make him an officially recognized calligrapher. Ink and pigment manufacture, paper analysis[10] and even the papermaking process itself were all studied in detail. Many calligraphers would make their own ink. The traditional black variety could be made from either the black wool fat of sheep, or from the soot of burnt vegetable matter. Green ink might be made from grinding down a piece of malachite stone and adding gum Arabic to act as a binding agent. Saffron produced the bright yellow ink, while blue might come from a natural vegetable colouring, or from grinding down a piece of lapis lazuli stone.

Unfortunately, today, Arabic calligraphy is a neglected art that many feel should be reinstated in Muslim school curricula.

Maghrebī/Andalusī Script

The calligraphers of *al-Maghreb al-'Aqsa* (the 'Farthest West', i.e. Morocco and Al-Andalus) developed a unique round, flowing script that today is generically referred to as *maghrebī* -- which, in effect, is the amalgamation of the *andalusī* and *fāsī* scripts. There are four distinctive *maghrebī* calligraphic styles of writing: *qayrawānī* (Tunisia), *fāsī* (Morocco), *andalusī* (Cordoba, Spain), and *sūdānī* (sub-Saharan Africa).

The *maghrebī* script is a direct descendent of *kufī*[11] and has several peculiar features. The stems of *alif*, *lam*, *lam-alif* and *ṭa* and *ẓa* [ا ل لا ط ظ] have club-like extensions at the top left. The stems of ط and ظ are drawn diagonally and while ق has one diacritical point, ف has its one placed below the letter.

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[9] Anyone using the Arabic-enabled version of Microsoft Word, for example, will be familiar with the standard Arabic fonts on offer. Using this software, one can generate, in a minute, a flawless page in Deco Thuluth that, in the past, would have taken a professional calligrapher many hours to replicate by hand.

[10] Paper came in various sizes, thicknesses, weights, colours and finishes. North African/Andalusian paper was manufactured in some delightful hues; bright yellow, red, purple and pink. Manuscripts written on such coloured sheets are known as *nasrī*, after the Nasrid dynasty of rulers in Granada. Paper surfaces were smoothed by rubbing raw egg over them and then using stone discs for polishing.

[11] *Kufī* is the first truly 'Islamic' script, but it originated in pre-Islamic 'Iraq a century before the city of Kufa was founded.

Ibn Khaldun on Arabic Calligraphy

Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), the great North African who many believe to be the father of all the social sciences, commented on Arabic calligraphy in his immensely important work, the *Muqaddimah*, the introduction to a much longer planned history of the world. Ibn Khaldun offers us an amazing sociological insight into the study of Arabic calligraphy in the following passage.

> … The development in man of writing, from potentiality to actuality, occurs only through teaching; its excellence is conditioned by the degree of social life and civilization attained by the city, the amenities of life enjoyed in it, and its demand for a more perfect script. For writing is a craft, and like all other crafts is conditioned by society.
>
> This is why we find most nomads illiterate, while those among them who can read or write do so only imperfectly and hesitatingly. This, too, is why we find the art of calligraphy more developed in the more opulent towns, owing to a longer tradition in the craft, as in Cairo today. … [12]

Ibn Khaldun then discusses the unique manner in which pupils -- the future calligraphers -- learn the Arabic alphabet in Al-Andalus.

> Writing is not learned that way in Spain [Al-Andalus] and the Maghreb. The letters are not learned individually according to norms the teacher gives to the pupil. Writing is learned by imitating complete words. The pupil repeats [these words], and the teacher examines him, until he knows well [how to write] and until the habit [of writing] is at his finger tips. Then, he is called a good [calligrapher].[13]

Handwritten Qur'ans from Al-Andalus

From the arrival in Al-Andalus in 711 of Tariq ibn Ziyad to the time of the caliph 'Abd al-Rahman III (ruled 912-961), the population of Muslims on the Iberian Peninsula continued to grow. Every city, town and village in the southern half of the peninsula had its mosques, where generation after generation of Muslims were educated in their religion, received their first formal language instruction, and communally worshipped Allah, their Almighty Creator.

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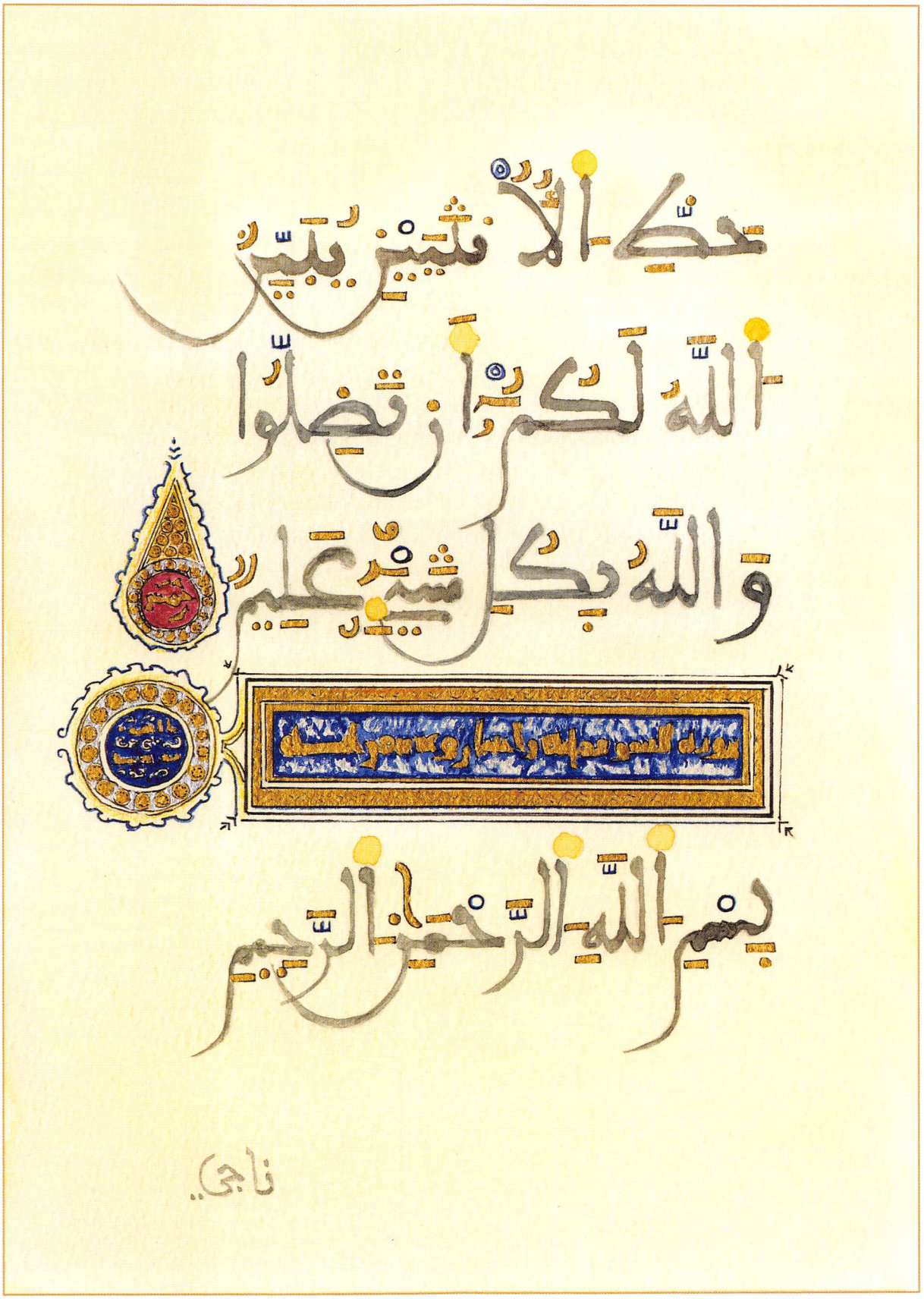
[12] Ibn Khaldun. *The Muqaddimah An Introduction to History*. Franz Rosenthal (ed.) v.2: Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press 1980: 338.
[13] Ibid., 378.



Armies of professional scribes throughout the country produced handwritten Qur'ans of astonishing beauty. Calligraphers were careful to adhere to accepted conventions when copying the Qur'an. (last *ayah* of *Surah Al-Nisa'*)

Armies of professional scribes throughout the country produced handwritten Qur'ans of astonishing beauty. Calligraphers were careful to adhere to accepted conventions when copying the Qur'an. Frequently, inks of a reddish-brown, or almost chocolate colour were used to write the text. While *tashdid* and *sukun* were highlighted in blue, a *hamza* was represented by a yellow dot. Fine short red horizontal lines indicated the *fatah* and *kasrah*.

Muslims thrived on Spanish soil for nine hundred years: from the arrival of Tariq ibn Ziyad in 711 until their forced expulsion from the peninsula in the early 17th century. The number of Qur'ans that must have been produced for such a large Muslim population can only be imagined. Sadly, today, the number of extant Qur'ans from Al-Andalus barely approaches two dozen.[14] The main reason for this will be explained fully in a subsequent chapter of this book.

Our story will now focus on one specific Qur'an which will exemplify for us the endurance of *Kalam Allah*. This magnificent Qur'an was written nine hundred years ago on bright yellow Játiva paper by a calligrapher who lived in the city of Cordoba, the jewel of Al-Andalus. The fact that this Qur'an has survived until today is a testament to the sincerity and steadfastness of many Muslims over many centuries.

[14] Despite the edicts (by the Catholic authorities) prohibiting the possession of any materials in Arabic, handwritten Qur'ans produced in the late 15th and early 16th centuries in Al-Andalus are still occasionally discovered walled up in old houses once occupied by Muslims. As recently as 2003, one such Qur'an was discovered hidden behind a wall, where it had been lovingly placed by its owner on a bed of straw.

Chapter Four

The 'Golden Age' of Al-Andalus occurred during the long reign of 'Abd al-Rahman III (912-961) and his son, Al-Hakam II (961-976). Sophisticated artificial irrigation networks transformed Spain into a virtual garden whose agricultural produce generated much wealth. Economically and intellectually, Al-Andalus was the most advanced and prosperous society in all of Europe. Its towns and cities became centres of commerce and very creative artistic expression.

Cordoba's 'Golden Age'

The prosperity of urban life was unprecedented. While the streets of Paris, for example, were garbage-strewn mud lanes, Cordoba (Arabic قرطبة), on the banks of the Guadalquivir River, had neat cobblestone streets that in the evening were lit by lanterns. Traditional two-storey houses featured gardens, running water[15] and a room used as a private library. The city boasted hundreds of mosques and innumerable public baths, libraries and *madrasahs*. The Great Mosque -- the largest mosque ever built in Europe -- was the religious and educational hub of the city. Not surprisingly, Cordoba became the model for all provincial capitals.

Al-Andalus was the envy of the world. It produced great statesmen and scholars unequalled in any European country at that time. Furthermore, Cordoba established the first multi-religious society in the West, where for a brief period in the 10th century, Muslims, Christians and Jews co-existed and flourished as independent societies tolerant of each other. It is only now, in the 21st century, that we are recognizing this achievement for what it was: a revolutionary social experiment that actually bore fruit. The centuries that followed this period of enlightenment were mired in bigotry and intolerance that have plagued mankind to the present day.

Arabic Language

The rich and diverse culture of Muslim Spain had Islam as its source of inspiration and the beautiful Arabic language as its means of expression. Local Spanish Christians, so infatuated with the Muslim language and culture that surrounded them, imitated the Arabs in every way, even dressing like them. The 'Arabized' Christians became known as Mozarabs (Arabic *Musta'rib*). In the mid-9th century, Alvaro, the bishop of Cordoba, lamented the fact that most of the Christian youth of the region wrote and spoke better Arabic than they did Latin. In fact, he said that it would have been difficult, at that time, to find anyone able to write a descent letter in Latin! Most Christian youths, he believed, could compete with the best Arabs in composing rhyming poetry in Arabic.

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[15] Indoor plumbing of this kind was an unheard of luxury in the rest of the world.

In 929, 'Abd al-Rahman III proclaimed himself caliph and seven years later began the construction of his new palace city: the *Madinah al-Zahra*, some 13 km to the northwest of Cordoba.

The multi-religious society of Al-Andalus was a literate one. Christians, Jews, and Muslims embraced the book culture and their respective scholars produced a vast corpus of writing, most of which was in Arabic. The Muslim rulers of Spain surrounded themselves with the best scholars of the day and established *madrasahs* throughout the country, thus bringing education to the masses.

Cordoba's Libraries

The caliphs of Al-Andalus took pride in having large private and public libraries employing teams of scribes to copy new books. Each year, tens of thousands of new books were produced and put on sale in the book markets of Cordoba alone. Rare books were often auctioned off to the highest bidder. The existence of such large libraries and book markets testifies to the expansion of literacy throughout *Dar al-Islam* that was only made possible by the adoption of paper and papermaking.

While all Cordovans had a great love of books, the greatest bibliophile must surely have been the caliph Al-Hakam II, the son of 'Abd al-Rahman III. During his peaceful reign, he amassed a library containing some 400,000 books, most read and annotated by the caliph himself! This library, unquestionably the largest in the world at the time, contained original Arabic works, but also many Arabic translations of the famous classical Greek authors Hippocrates, Galen, Euclid and Aristotle. The caliph, on occasion, even received gifts of Greek manuscripts from the Byzantine emperor in Constantinople. In his palace, Al-Hakam II established a *sina'at al-naskh*, a scriptorium for copying and binding books. Some of his many Greek books would eventually be translated into Latin at the School of Translators in Toledo (see Chapter Six), thus helping fuel the European renaissance ('re-awakening') centuries later.

Madinah al-Zahra

In 929, 'Abd al-Rahman III proclaimed himself caliph and seven years later began the construction of his new palace city: the *Madinah al-Zahra*, some 13 km to the northwest of Cordoba.

'Abd al-Rahman III was an enthusiastic builder and employed only the best architects and engineers, who used only the finest materials including marble imported from North Africa. The palace city was truly a marvel with sprawling palaces, opulent gardens and water-courses, villas and markets, caravanserais, mosques and *madrasahs*. Although a ruin today, the complex is surely one of the outstanding architectural achievements of the Islamic world.

The *Madinah al-Zahra* was ingeniously built on the slopes of the Sierra Morena mountains and was spread out over three wide and long descending terraces. The highest terrace was reserved for the caliph and his family; the middle terrace contained government and administrative buildings and some reception halls; the lowest level was intended for public use and had markets, gardens and baths.

Paper came in various sizes, thicknesses, weights, colours and finishes. North African/Andalusian paper was manufactured in some delightful hues; bright yellow, red, purple and pink. Manuscripts written on such coloured sheets are known as *nasrī,* after the Nasrid dynasty of rulers in Granada. (*Surah Nazi'at*: 23-26)

'Abd al-Rahman III liked to impress his guests in one sun-filled reception hall in particular. It contained a large pool filled with quicksilver, which when disturbed, would create lightning-like flashes that circled the room. Ambassadors were welcomed with great ceremony to the caliph's court at Al-Zahra. Stanley Lane-Poole, the 19th century British Islamophile and archaeologist, wrote eloquently of the Byzantine ambassador's first audience with the caliph in the year 949.

> Having … fixed upon the vaulted hall in his palace of Al-Zahra as the place where he would receive their credentials, orders were issued to the high functionaries of state and to the commanders of the forces to prepare for the ceremony. The hall was beautifully decorated, and a throne glittering with gold and sparkling with gems was raised in the midst. On either hand of the throne stood the caliph's sons; next to them the viziers, each in his post to the right and left; then came the chamberlains, the sons of the viziers, the freedmen of the caliph, and the officers of the household. The court of the palace was strewn with the richest carpets and most costly rugs, and silk awnings of the most gorgeous kinds were thrown over the doors and arches. Presently the ambassadors entered the hall, and were struck with astonishment and awe at the magnificence displayed before them and the power of the sultan before whom they stood. Then they advanced a few steps, and presented a letter of their master, Constantine, son of Leo, Lord of Constantinople, written in Greek upon blue paper in gold characters.[16]

Less than a century after its construction, the *Madinah al-Zahra*, was destroyed in 1010 by marauding Berbers who had been imported from North Africa to bring peace to Al-Andalus during the final days of the Caliphate. Its dissolution in 1031 heralded the slow demise of the Anadalusian civilization. The once unified Muslim state reverted to two dozen tiny 'party kingdoms' (the *muluk al-tawa'if*) who struggled to maintain their independence as more powerful Christian states to the north continued their slow, but incessant, *reconquista* ('reconquering') of Muslim Spain.

During this chaotic period, our hand-written Qur'an passed from one owner to another. It had been in Al-Hakam's personal library, but when the *Madinah al-Zahra* was ransacked, the Qur'an was wrapped up in a wall tapestry and taken to Cordoba by a court chamberlain. It remained in the house of his family, the Banu Musa, for twenty years.

[16] Lane-Poole, Stanley. *The Muslims in Spain.* New Delhi: Goodword Books, 2001: 125.

Chapter Five

The city of Cordoba in the 10th and 11th centuries must surely have been a sight to behold. The city of some 500,000[17] inhabitants was certainly the largest in Europe at the time and one of the wealthiest in the world. Marble villas and palaces with sprawling gardens lined the banks of the *Wadi al-Kabir* ('The Great River', the Gauadalquivir). Cordovans enjoyed a high standard of living. Their typical whitewashed houses built around a central courtyard, complete with fragrant flower beds, and a gurgling fountain, are still preferred by many Cordovans today. These practical homes evoke the quintessential domestic architecture of Muslim dwellings throughout all of North Africa.

The city's markets were legendary. Entire sections of the *suq* were devoted to specific trades specializing in leather crafts, metal and wood work, pottery and silk weaving. The thriving book market offered the latest hand-written copies of the Noble Qur'an. Booksellers would advertise the latest works written by Cordoba's many resident scholars: philosophers, geographers, historians, astronomers, mathematicians, and renowned literary figures. On the edge of the market, farmers from surrounding villages would sell their fresh seasonal produce, which included all kind of exotic flowers, fruits and vegetables.

Clear mountain water was channeled through lead pipes to both palaces and public homes. For Mediaeval Christians, personal hygiene was considered heretical. So, while the rest of Europe sanctified filthiness and abhorred the washing of the body, Cordoba boasted some nine hundred public baths. For Muslims, 'cleanliness is half of faith' (النظافة من الإيمان). Public baths were an important institution in all Muslim countries and, in Al-Andalus, continued to be frequented until the 16th century, when King Philip II (1527-1598) ordered the destruction of all such facilities throughout Spain. He believed that because all Spanish Muslims had been forcibly baptized, there was no further need to indulge in the heathen practice of bathing!

Basic Education

Spanish Muslims, as we have seen, created an extremely literate society in an era of illiteracy elsewhere in the world. While Al-Andalus attracted scholars from major Islamic centres in North Africa and further east, a genuine thirst for knowledge led some Spanish Muslims to travel abroad -- even as far away as Bukhara, in Central Asia! Upon completion of their studies, they returned home to teach what they had learned. In their ignorance, most of Europe frowned on education, but Muslim Spain from the 9th to the 12th centuries was a rare oasis of learning.

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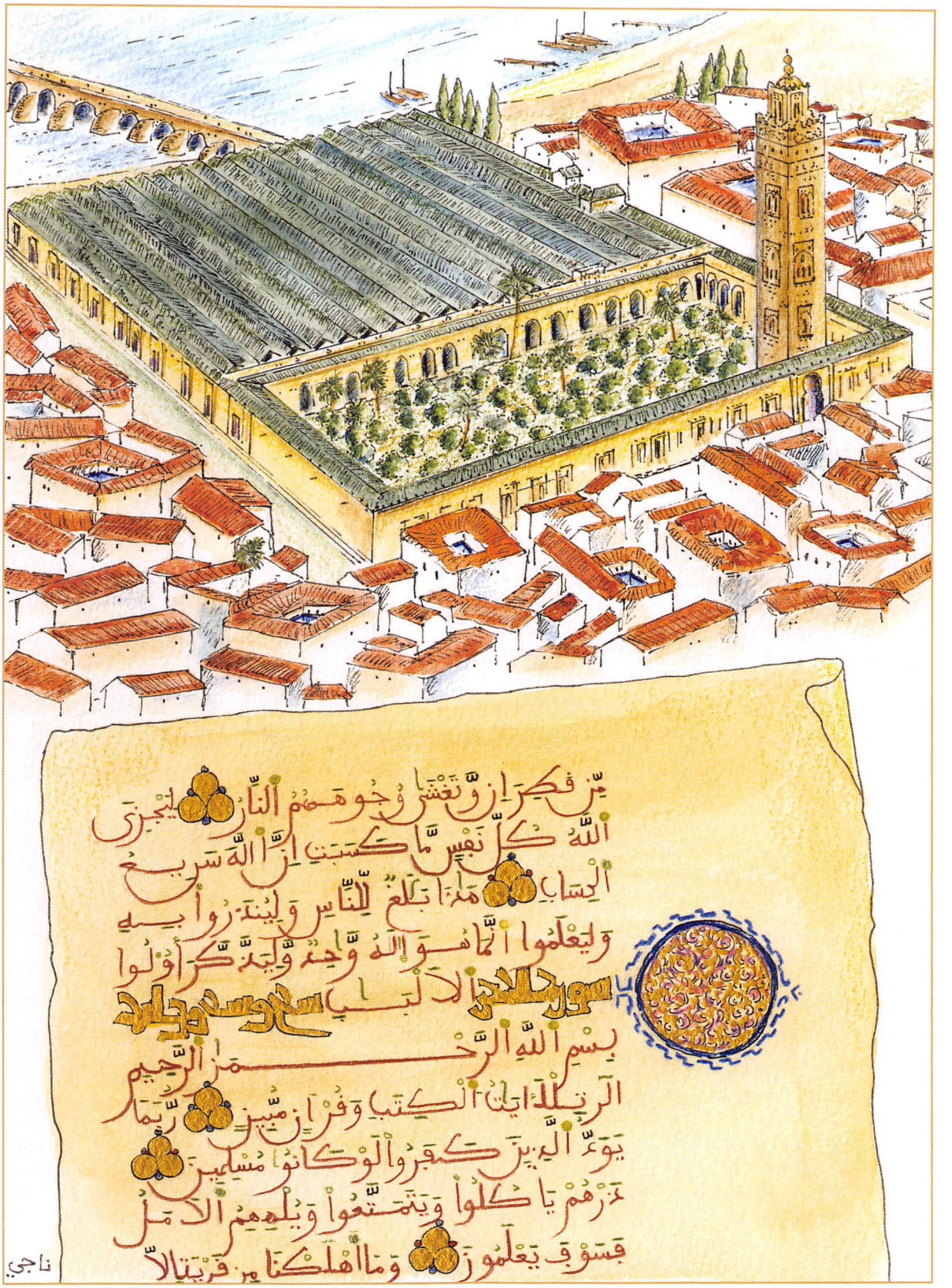
[17] Towards the end of the Cordovan Caliphate in the early 11th century, the population of Cordoba might have been closer to a million.



Of the thousands of mosques that once formed the centre of Islamic life in countless cities, towns and villages of Muslim Spain, very few have survived. The *Jami' al-Kabir*, the Great Mosque of Cordoba, however, still stands even though it is now a church-- known to Spaniards as 'La Mesquita' (the mosque). It is one of the great architectural masterpieces of the Islamic world. (last *ayah* of *Surah Ibrahim* and first *ayah* of *Surah Al-Hijr*)

The enlightened Muslim leaders of Al-Andalus promoted the elementary education of their people in schools, where even the children of the poor received some tutoring. Advanced studies could be pursued in the Great Mosque (the *Jami' al-Kabir*), which attracted Islamic scholars of renown. By the mid-10th century, it had become a centre of learning which welcomed eager and competent students from all over Spain, parts of North Africa, Europe and even Asia. The curriculum was a comprehensive one which included *'ulum al-naqliyyah*: the Islamic sciences of the Qur'an and *Sunnah* and grammar; and *'ulum al-'aqliyyah*: arithmetic, geometry, algebra, botany and medicine.

The Great Mosque of Cordoba

Of the thousands of mosques that once formed the centre of Islamic life in countless cities, towns and villages of Muslim Spain, very few have survived. Most mosques, *madrasahs* and cemeteries were destroyed long ago. The *Jami' al-Kabir*, the Great Mosque of Cordoba, however, still stands even though it is now a church[18] -- known to Spaniards as 'La Mesquita' (the mosque). It is one of the great architectural masterpieces of the Islamic world.

When Cordoba fell to the Christians in 1236, the Great Mosque was converted into a church, but no real damage was done to it until three centuries later when a large intrusive chapel was constructed in the middle of the mosque. Irreplaceable mosaic walls and embellished wooden ceilings were destroyed to build the church extension, whose structure has been likened to a large spider astride the mosque. In 1526, on a visit to the city, the Emperor Charles V was so saddened at the desecration of such a fine building that he reportedly said, "You have built here what you or anyone might have built anywhere else, but you have destroyed what is unique in the world."

Convivencia and *Reconquista*

The period of *convivencia*[19], or peaceful co-existence, ended abruptly with the arrival of the Berber Almohads from Morocco in the mid-12th century. 'Abd al-Mu'min (1094-1163), their leader, ordered all Christians and Jews to convert to Islam. At this same time, the Christians in northern Spain received help in their 'crusade', known as the *reconquista*[20] against the Muslims in Spain. The pope himself supported their efforts, just as he had supported and encouraged the First Crusade to the Holy Land in 1095.

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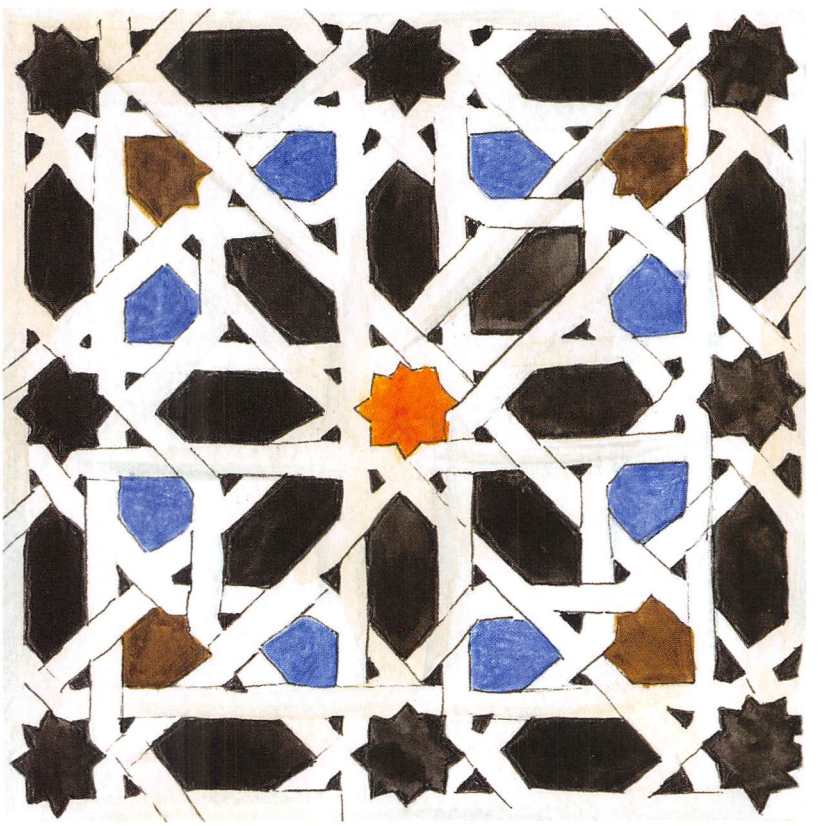
[18] Right up to the city's capture by Christian forces, the mosque remained the centre of a bustling city whose beauty was only matched by Byzantium (Constantinople). The rhythm of the day's activities revolved around the five daily communal prayers. Today, Catholics worship freely in the mosque, but the Islamic community of Cordoba is now demanding similar access.

[19] *Convivencia*, a Spanish term, refers to the 'coexistence' and relative tolerance exhibited by the multi-ethnic/multi-religious society of Al-Andalus during various periods of its history.

[20] *Reconquista*, a Spanish/Portuguese word meaning 'reconquest', 'recapturing'. The term refers to the 800 year long struggle by several Spanish Christian kingdoms to retake by force all Muslim territories in the Iberian Peninsula. The reconquest was successful in 1492 with the surrender of Granada, the last independent Muslim state in Spain, to the Catholic Monarchs.

During the centuries following the collapse of the Cordovan Caliphate in 1031, Muslims, who ended up as minorities in Christian held territory, were continually harassed and eventually forced to convert to Christianity, or emigrate -- mainly to Granada, the last independent Muslim kingdom in the land.

Our Qur'an had been in the possession of the Banu Musa family. For twenty years, family members read from this Qur'an. It was taken to the Great Mosque during Ramadhan where several readings of the entire Qur'an were completed. When one daughter of the Banu Musa married into the family of the Banu Hud, the Qur'an was taken to Toledo, where the Bani Hud were well-established.



Chapter Six

Al-Andalus was the most distant region of *Dar al-Islam* in the 10th century, but despite political divisions separating the Islamic world, Muslim Spain was always an active player in the formation of Islamic culture and in the transmission of scientific knowledge to the West.

After the fall of the Umayyad Caliphate in Cordoba in 1031, our Qur'an was taken by a Muslim family north to Toledo (طليطلة *Tulayṭulah*), the old Visigothic capital, which was still a populous, multilingual city famed for its religious tolerance. This family, the Banu Hud, were scholars of great renown and lived in the Bab Mardum district of the city.

Tolerant Toledo

Toledo had a large population of Mozarabs, Arabic speaking Christians, as well as sizeable Jewish and Muslim communities, all sharing a long tradition of scholarship and a love of learning. In the Middle Ages, Al-Andalus was a unique example in the world of social integration. Minority Christians and Jews paid the normal poll tax (*jizyah*) which guaranteed them state protection. Rarely was there blatant persecution of minorities; this occurred only after the establishment in the 15th century of the dreaded Spanish Inquisition, whose raison d'être was to purify -- or ethnically cleanse -- the Iberian Peninsula of all Jews and Christians in the name of religion. And Arabic was the natural medium of artistic expression for all communities. Fluency in Arabic became the hallmark of an educated Muslim or non-Muslim. While in Al-Andalus, scholars of all faiths wrote on philosophy, the sciences, literature and, of course, religion, the rest of Europe was intellectually deprived.

Libraries of Toledo

By the end of the 11th century, the libraries of Toledo were literally bursting with the accumulated knowledge of both the western and eastern halves of *Dar al-Islam*. Moreover, it was only in Al-Andalus that one had access to the vast corpus of scientific knowledge, then available, in Arabic, Hebrew, Greek and Latin. When the Ta'ifa kingdom of Toledo fell to Alfonso VI of Castile in 1085, the Spanish king and his successors could have easily expelled the Jewish and Muslim populations from the city. But they all respected the city's scholarly traditions, so Muslims and Jews continued to live in Toledo until the edicts of the Inquisition led to their expulsion in 1492 and 1502 respectively.

Schools of Translation

In the 12th century, the wealth of knowledge contained in the libraries of Toledo was appreciated by many non-Spanish scholars who gravitated there from many parts of Europe.[21]

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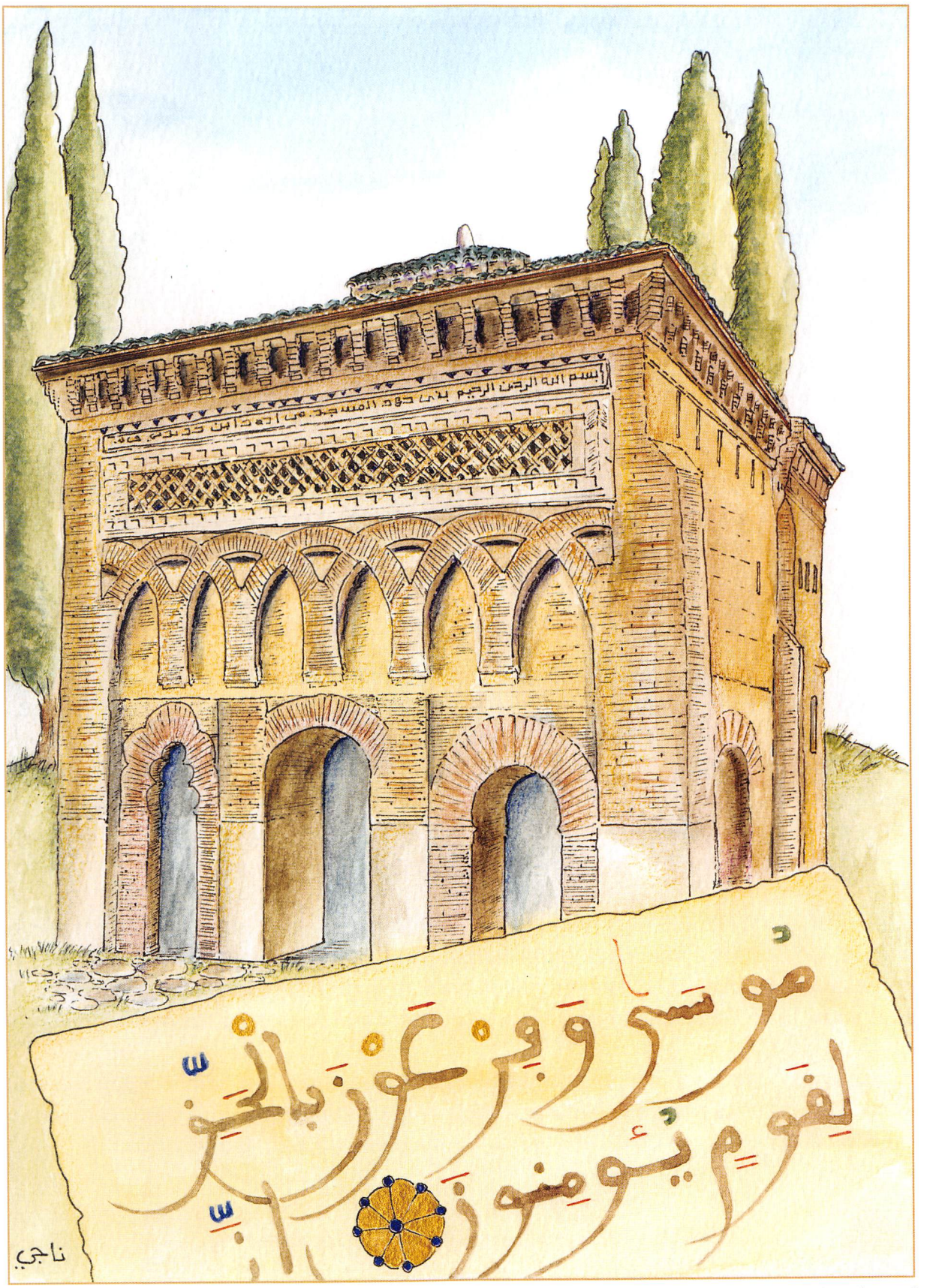
[21] It is ironic that at the same time as the crusades were launched from Clermont, France in 1095, the wealth contained in the libraries of Muslim Spain were being recognized by the West and eagerly translated.



Toledo, unlike some other former Muslim cities in Al-Andalus, maintained its multilingual, multi-religious identity until the end of the 15th century. The small, but exquisitely built Bab al-Mardum Mosque, was erected in the 10th century; it is the only mosque out of ten in Toledo that has survived. (last part of *Surah Al-Qasas*: 3)

Their aim was to begin to translate this font of knowledge; consequently, a school, or college, of translators was established for this purpose.[22]

Translation Process

The translation effort was international in scope as even scholars from England, Germany, Italy and other countries took part. The actual process of translation was a uniquely collaborative one; it was an old tried and true method. Teams of multi-religious scholars, all sharing a common mother tongue, namely the regional Spanish dialect, were carefully assembled. Jews and Muslims were crucial in the translation effort as they were the only members having direct linguistic access to the Arabic texts, which were first translated orally into the common Spanish vernacular before being written down in Latin by the team's Christian members. The clerk supervising the entire process and inspecting the final version of the Latin translation usually put his name to it.

Later, written translations were made directly from Arabic into the fledgling Castilian Spanish language, thus avoiding Latin altogether. A vast amount of knowledge was transmitted in a relatively short period of time due to the close collaboration of all scholars involved.

Important Translators

The most important of all the Toledan translators must surely be the Italian, Gerard of Cremona (1114-1187). He had been attracted to Toledo as it was the only place in Europe where, as a Christian, he could be fully immersed in Arabic and Muslim culture. He learned Arabic initially to translate Ptolemy's *Almagest* (Arabic الكتاب المجسطي, i.e. 'The Great Book'), the most important source of ancient Greek mathematical astronomy. He successfully translated the *Almagest* for the first time into Latin, and eventually translated almost ninety other works including Al-Khwarizmi's great work on algebra, the *Al- Maqalah fi Hisab al-Jabr wa-l-Muqabilah*.

Michael Scot (1175-1232?) was yet another important Toledan translator. In his thirst for knowledge, the Scotsman studied in Oxford, Paris, Bologna (Italy), Palermo (Sicily) and Toledo, where he learned Arabic and Hebrew. Scot became a prolific translator; it is for his Latin translations of Ibn Rushd's commentaries on Aristotle[23] that he is most famous.

It is necessary to remember that medical practice in Muslim Spain had reached such an advanced level that Europeans of means would come there for operations. Muslim medical practitioners had been successfully using Ibn Sina's magnum opus, the *Canon of Medicine*

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[22] Library collections in other Muslim cities were so important that when they too fell to Christian kings, similar translation schools were established.

[23] Some scholars today maintain that the European Renaissance might actually have begun in Toledo. The Latin translation of Aristotle reached Europe, and by the middle of the 13th century, was being taught at the University of Paris.

(Arabic: القانون في الطب *Al-Qanun fi al-Tibb*) and Al-Razi's *Kitab al-Hawi fi al-Tibb* ('The Comprehensive Book of Medicine'). So, it is no exaggeration to claim that the field of medicine in Europe changed forever once Europeans acquired the Toledan Latin translations of these two seminal medical texts.

Al-Andalus clearly played an important role in the transmission and preservation of Greek learning, but also in making important Muslim contributions to mathematics and philosophy. Had it not been for these developments, one wonders if Isaac Newton -- despite his incredible intellect -- could ever have made the advances he did in physics and mathematics in the 17th century.

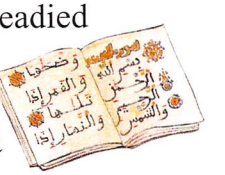
Bab al-Mardum Mosque

As mentioned earlier, Toledo, unlike some other former Muslim cities in Al-Andalus, maintained its multilingual, multi-religious identity until the end of the 15th century. Some members of the Banu Hud family of scholars had helped out in the School of Translation while others continued to write original works in Arabic. The family lived in front of the Bab al-Mardum Mosque.[24]

Our Qur'an, now several hundred years old, was treasured by each new generation of the Banu Hud. On Fridays and during the holy month of Ramadhan, family members would read the Qur'an in the mosque. Although everyone in the family could read and understand *Kitab Allah*, the younger members of the family were no longer fluent in spoken Arabic. The political situation in Spain had changed dramatically; fewer and fewer Muslims were feeling comfortable in Toledo, their place of birth.

In 1492, events in Granada had reverberated in every city, town and village that still had a Muslim population. The last independent Muslim kingdom in Spain had fallen to the army of Ferdinand and Isabella, the Spanish king and queen of Castile. Despite now being ruled by Christian monarchs, the Muslims of Granada had been promised that their rights to live and freely worship as Muslims would all be guaranteed. For this reason, many Muslims chose to leave other regions of Spain and migrate to Granada, where they believed they would be safer and freer to practice their religion, *Din al-Haq al-Islam*.

It was, therefore, with much sadness that the Banu Hud family members left their beloved home and the Bab al-Mardum Mosque behind and proceeded to Granada. Carts were readied to transport the family's moveable possessions. Once again, our Qur'an was lovingly wrapped in a rich tapestry, placed in a wooden chest, and personally taken to Granada by the patriarch of the Banu Hud. It was now becoming a well-travelled Qur'an.



[24]The small, but exquisitely built Bab al-Mardum Mosque was erected in the 10th century. It is the only mosque out of ten in Toledo that has survived. It is now being used as a church.

Chapter Seven

As more and more Muslim territory fell to Christian forces in their drive to complete the *reconquista* of the Iberian Peninsula, Granada, in the end, remained the sole independent Muslim kingdom in all of Spain. As mentioned previously, Granada became a refuge for many Muslims who did not wish to live under Christian domination, and by the end of the 15th century, the population of the tiny enclave had, therefore, dramatically increased. In 1482, a ten year-long war of survival began for the Kingdom of Granada.

The ruling family, the Beni Nasr, had sought help from the Marinids of Morocco, the Mamluks of Egypt and the new Ottoman sultans in Turkey. But no help of any real substance ever materialized. The Beni Nasr, themselves, were weakened by a series of pretenders to the throne, some of whom were willing to join forces with the enemy to defeat other Muslims.

Alhambra Palace

Muslims had controlled large parts of Spain and Portugal ever since the victories of Tariq ibn Ziyad in 711. Now the final pages in this amazing history were being written.

Few physical traces have remained of the eight-hundred[25] year-long Muslim presence in Spain. However, sections of the magnificent palace of the Nasrid monarchs of Granada, the Alhambra, have survived in an almost perfect state of preservation, thus providing a visible sampling of the creative genius of Spanish Muslim architects.

The Alhambra (from the Arabic *al-Qal'ah al-Hamra*, meaning 'red castle') Palace, built on a high hill overlooking the fertile plains and the Sierra Nevada Mountains[26], is in fact, a royal city in miniature. The structure, very plain on the outside, and built up over more than two centuries, is a maze of exquisite patios, gardens, royal suites, mosques, *madrasahs*[27], baths, cemeteries, military barracks and stables. The magnificent royal residence is what has still survived.

The architects of this fabled residence tried to outdo each other in creating a masterpiece of breathtaking beauty. An Arab visitor to the palace likened it to a "silver vase filled with emeralds". Sunlight and fresh breezes passed through gardens replete with fountains, running water and reflecting pools. This reminded some of a verse from the Noble Qur'an:

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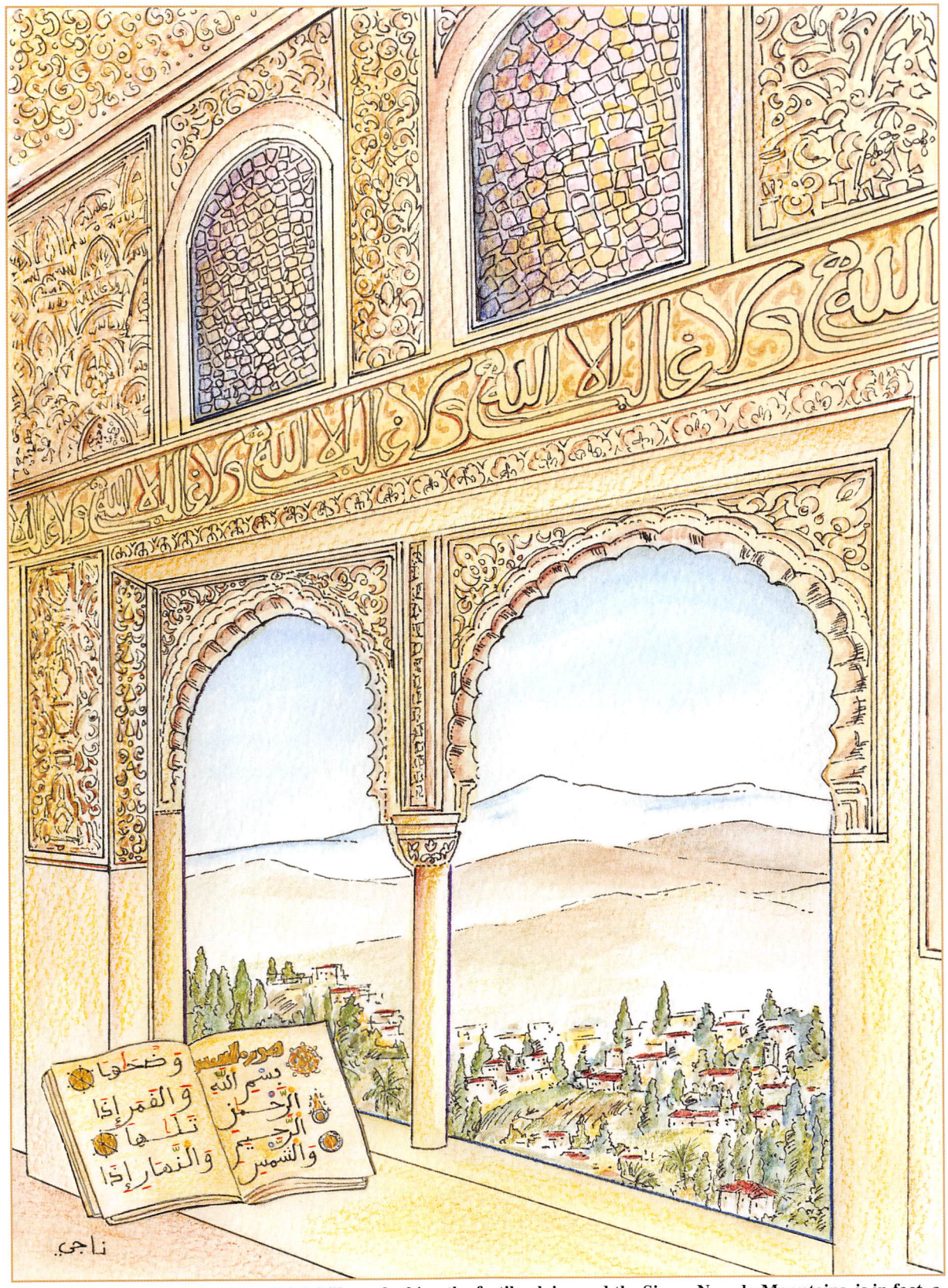
[25]Nine hundred years if the *Morisco* presence in the 16th century is considered.

[26]The highest mountain in mainland Spain -- Mulhacén -- is part of the Sierra Nevada range and provides a backdrop for the Alhambra Palace. Always snow-covered, it is named after Abu l-Hasan 'Ali (reign 1464-1482; 1483-1485), or Mulay Hasan, one of the last Muslim rulers of Spain.

[27]The secluded *madrasah* of Yusuf I dating from 1349 was built opposite the city's main mosque. As towns and cities fell to the Christians, Muslim scholars would flee to Granada, seeking asylum there. This *madrasah*, therefore, became the last haven of Islamic learning in Al-Andalus.



The Alhambra Palace, built on a high hill overlooking the fertile plains and the Sierra Nevada Mountains, is in fact, a royal city in miniature. "There is no Victor but Allah!" (ولا غالب الا الله) became the Nasrid motto and can be seen repeated thousands of times on decorative inscriptions throughout the Alhambra Palace. In 1499, the first serious protests against the persecution of the Muslim population of Granada took place in the city's crowded Al-Baycin quarter, lying just below the Alhambra Palace.

جَنَّٰتٌ تَجۡرِي مِن تَحۡتِهَا ٱلۡأَنۡهَٰرُ - آل عمران: ١٥

(Gardens beneath which rivers flow.) *Âl-'Imrân*: 15

Legend has it that when Muhammad ibn Ahmar (1232-1273), the founder of the Nasrid dynasty, returned from battle, his townspeople greeted him with cries of "Victor! Victor!" Ibn Ahmar then correctly retorted, *wa la Ghalib 'ila-llah* (و لا غالب الا الله) , "There is no Victor but Allah!" This soon became the Nasrid motto and can be seen repeated thousands of times on decorative inscriptions throughout the Alhambra Palace. The same motto was also very frequently placed on Nasrid gold and silver coins (See page 48).

Fall of Granada 1492

The final stage of the *reconquista* was led by the Catholic Monarchs, King Ferdinand II of Aragon and Queen Isabella I of Castile. Christians from all over Europe helped the Catholic Monarchs in their siege of Granada. But, by November 1491 the starving population of the city was forced to surrender. According to the terms of surrender, under Christian rule, Muslims would be permitted to preserve their religious identity, their language and customs. The keys of the city were then transferred to the Catholic Monarchs by Abu 'Abdallah (1482-1483; 1486-1492) on the morning of January 2, 1492.

However, within a few years of the surrender of the last Muslim stronghold in Spain to the Christians, the Catholic Monarchs began an intentional, systematic persecution of the country's Muslim population. Before the end of the century, Cardinal Ximénes de Cisneros (1436-1517) of Toledo, had convinced Queen Isabella to offer the Muslims of Spain an ultimatum: baptism into the Catholic faith or exile. By thus reneging on their signed pledges, the dishonest Catholic Monarchs instigated a century-long attack, which ended with the mass expulsion of the country's entire Muslim population.

Persecution of Muslims

In 1499, the first serious protests against the persecution of the Muslim population of Granada took place in the city's crowded Al-Baycin quarter, lying just below the Alhambra Palace. Cisneros, now promoted to Grand Inquisitor[28], believed that contracts with Muslims were not

[28]The Spanish Inquisition was a tribunal of church elders established by the Catholic Monarchs in 1478 with the sole aim of maintaining Catholic orthodoxy throughout the land, once it had been 'liberated' and unified in 1492. This goal was reached by ethnically cleansing Spain first of its Jewish population (1492) and later of all Muslims (1609-1614). Heretical Christians (Protestants) also suffered. Countless numbers of Muslims were brought before the Grand Inquisitor and received sentences ranging from incarceration (and the resultant loss of all private property), heinous torture, mandatory work as a galley slave, or even death by burning at the stake. The Spanish Inquisition was finally abolished in 1834.

binding on Christians. The Catholic Monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella, were convinced that they had been divinely chosen to purify Spain from unbelief. Under threat of death, they forced Muslims to surrender their Islamic identity and become token Christians. Officially, by 1502, all Muslims in Castile had been baptized and converted to Christianity.

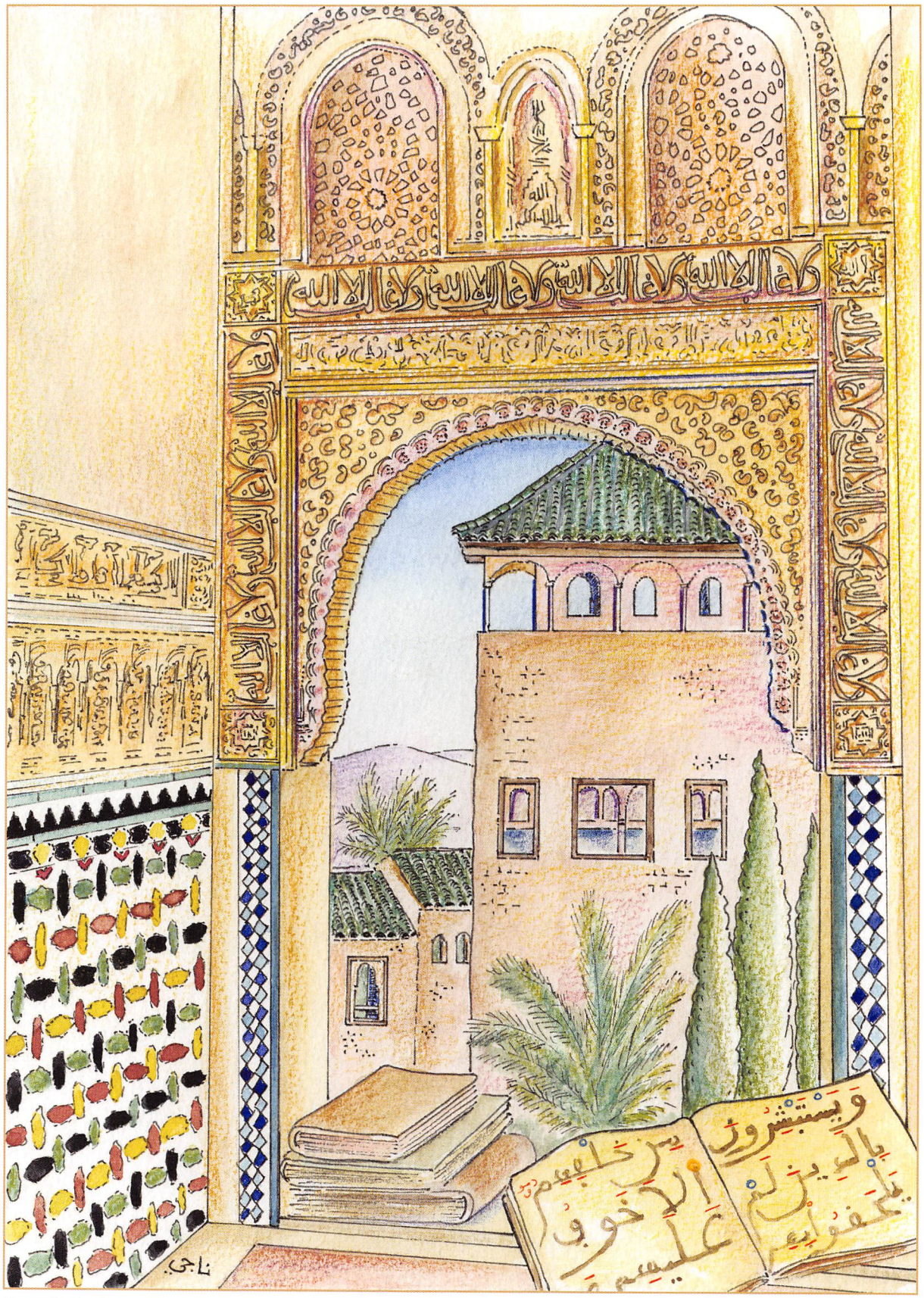
Initially, many affluent Spanish Muslims fled to North Africa, to towns such as Fez, Tlemcen, Tunis and others. The poorer off stayed, and suffered unspeakable humiliation, torture, or worse. For the vast majority of 'new Christians' (the forcibly-converted Muslims, called *Moriscos*), لا إله إلا الله, the glorious *Shahadah*, was still forever emblazoned on their hearts and in their psyche. They were the descendents of Muslims who had built from scratch an Islamic civilization of astonishing sophistication and beauty. It was a profound belief in لا إله إلا الله محمد رسول الله that had led the Muslims of the past to victory and a firm belief in لا إله إلا الله محمد رسول الله would *insha'Allah* lead them once again to victory despite all the upheavals, trials and tribulations facing them. For these Muslims, 16th century Spain was little more than a death camp, but their faith in لا إله إلا الله محمد رسول الله never wavered.

As the Muslim population had already been baptized, the authorities believed there was no need for mosques and *madrasahs*, which were converted into churches, or destroyed. In a previous chapter, we also read about the closing of all public baths. Muslims were further humiliated by not being able to speak, read, or write Arabic, their sacred language. Even the use of Arabic family names was forbidden. Islamic dress and the practice of all religious customs were outlawed. Despite all these intrusions into their daily lives, the *Moriscos* continued to live and worship as Muslims, but always in secret, in the privacy of their own homes. But, as their conversion to Christianity was always suspect of being insincere, they were constantly under the watchful eyes of the Inquisition.

This intolerable situation continued for more than a century. Finally, at the start of the 17th century, Philip III of Spain began the systematic expulsion of the *Moriscos*, thus realizing the goal of Ferdinand and Isabella: an ethnically cleansed Iberian Peninsula. Between the years 1609 and 1614, a half million Muslims were forced to leave their homeland, with no hope of ever returning.

Our Qur'an had been brought from Toledo to Granada by the Banu Hud family. Like so many Muslims of the period, Granada to them had appeared as an oasis of calm in a very turbulent sea. But, within a few years of their arrival, Granada, the last bastion of Muslim presence in Spain, fell to the Catholic Monarchs and, shortly thereafter, bigoted persecution wracked the lives of the Banu Hud and all other Muslims. The incessant persecution and torture continued for a century.

Our well-travelled Qur'an was now almost four hundred years old. Members of the Banu Hud kept the Qur'an well hidden in a specially constructed wall closet. For all Muslims in Al-Andalus, the day began and ended with a communal recitation of the Noble Qur'an.



Few physical traces have remained of the eight-hundred year-long Muslim presence in Spain. However, sections of the magnificent palace of the Nasrid monarchs of Granada, the Alhambra, have survived in an almost perfect state of preservation, thus providing a visible sampling of the creative genius of Spanish Muslim architects.

But this was becoming more and more dangerous. There were no longer any mosques or *madrasahs* to go to. The *adhan* would be recited secretly in each Muslim home. Family members would pray together and occasionally the *jama'at* would be increased when relatives or close family friends were visiting. For some Muslims, it was even difficult to preserve the Arabic language, their mother tongue. Arabic, of course, could not be spoken in any public place, so it was obvious that for many families, Arabic -- if spoken at all -- would only be used at home. Muslimahs -- Muslim sisters, daughters, wives, aunts, mothers and grandmothers -- played a crucial role in preserving the *Moriscos'* Muslim identity. Muslim mothers, for example, in the confines of their homes, would instruct their children in the rudiments of *Din al-Haq al-Islam* and teach them elementary Arabic so they could begin the memorization of *Kalam Allah*.

The Banu Hud family suffered greatly during this period. Several family members had been caught speaking Arabic in the marketplace and were immediately summoned before the Grand Inquisitor, tried and sentenced to imprisonment. The family's home in Granada was not confiscated, though, and the well-travelled Qur'an remained safely hidden, only to be taken from the closet when all doors had been locked and windows shuttered.

The Banu Hud knew only too well how fortunate they were to actually have a Qur'an to read. For one main reason -- a travesty unlike any other -- many other Muslims in Granada were deprived of being able to read from hand-written copies of the Noble Qur'an.

The Nasrid motto: "There is no Victor but Allah!" (ولا غالب الا الله).

Chapter Eight

The paper production from the Játiva paper mills augured well for the future. Scribes throughout Al-Andalus now had access to an inexpensive alternative to parchment. The Noble Qur'an was readily copied in the handsome *anadalusī* script by professional scribes and their Qur'ans reached every home in the land. Who could have predicted that one day the Noble Qur'an and all other works in Arabic would be doomed to the bonfires of religious intolerance?

Plight of *Moriscos*

One ongoing story of 16th century Spain was the plight of the Muslim *Moriscos* (*al-Muriskiyyun* in Modern Standard Arabic), the hundreds of thousands of unwilling converts to Christianity. Since the beginning of the century, they had been suspected of being crypto-Muslims, i.e. clandestinely still practicing their Islamic faith, speaking Arabic, their liturgical language, and still adhering to many Islamic customs. Indeed, that is precisely who they were: unwilling converts from Islam on the outside, but Allah-fearing Muslims in their hearts. After the fall of Granada, Spain could no longer tolerate the differences found in its society, and simply decided to eliminate them.

We have seen how displeased the Catholic Monarchs were with the slow progress in the Christianization of the Muslim population of Granada. They then asked the former archbishop of Toledo, Ximénes de Cisneros, to help in speeding up the rate of conversions. Cisneros was the single individual who, because of his arrogance and fanaticism, destroyed any faith Muslims might have had in Spanish justice.

Cisneros and Book-Burning

Cisneros thought he could speed up the process of conversions by demanding that all Granadan Muslims immediately surrender all their religious books to him. Reluctantly, Muslims complied by handing over thousands of priceless hand-written Qur'ans and other Islamic texts, which were all publicly burnt in a great bonfire in October 1501. The only manuscripts spared from the flames were a few medical texts. Such terror tactics employed by Cisneros and his Inquisition effectively signaled the end of Islam as an open public religion in Granada.

Ritual book-burning is a category of biblioclasm, the wanton -- and often ceremonial -- destruction of books. Biblioclasm has no geographical boundaries, historical limitations, or religious restraints. When the Spanish colonized the New World, they committed yet another act of biblioclasm in Mexico. In 1562, thousands of books containing the cumulative wisdom of the Mayan culture were burnt in a single day. A fanatic Catholic priest, not unlike Cisneros, had attempted to cleanse the Mexican natives of 'devilish' thoughts. Four Mayan books were saved -- kept as curiosities. Centuries later, these codices held the key to unlocking the mystery of Mayan hieroglyphs.

And in our own lifetimes, in 1992 -- ironically, the 500th anniversary of the fall of Granada -- the world witnessed the largest single act of book-burning in modern history. In one day and one night, in the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo, 1.5 million books including priceless hand-written manuscripts in Arabic, Persian and Turkish and countless archival material were burned in a systematic bombing of the National Library and the Oriental Institute by Serb nationalist forces. This egregious example of an attempt to physically erase, by burning, all written traces of the Bosnian culture was a success. But the destruction of the national library and all its contents could not erase a people's multi-religious identity as Bosnians.

Cisneros had tried to coerce an entire people by committing one callous act of blasphemy: the public burning of sacred books. But, in the end, he only succeeded in engendering a loathing for Catholicism and Spanish bureaucracy that lasted a hundred years. Despite the persecution that only worsened, the Moriscos remained steadfast in their faith, remembering Allah's admonition:

وَٱعْتَصِمُوا۟ بِحَبْلِ ٱللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا۟ ۚ وَٱذْكُرُوا۟ نِعْمَتَ ٱللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ - آل عمران: ١٠٣

(And hold fast, all of you together, to the Rope of Allah (i.e. this Qur'an), and be not divided among yourselves, and remember Allah's Favour on you ...) *Âl-'Imrân*: 103

Qur'ans could no longer be copied openly. Copies of the Noble Qur'an that had survived the flames, were secretly hidden under one's clothes and passed from house to house where they were carefully reproduced by the most competent family members.

Inquisition Horrors

The odious Spanish Inquisition forced *Moriscos* to live in a state of perpetual fear; it only increased the *Moriscos*' aversion to Christianity and their determination to preserve their faith in لا إله إلا الله محمد رسول الله .

Moriscos were regularly brought before the inquisitors for resisting attempts by the Catholic authorities to impose one brand of compulsory spirituality on all the inhabitants of Spain. *Moriscos*, still clinging to the religion of their ancestors and not wanting to give it up, were under immense scrutiny; stories abound of *Moriscos* being tried for infringements of the many royal edicts. One could be severely punished for simply washing or praying as a Muslim; observing Islamic food taboos (such as refusing to eat the meat of animals that had died a natural death); reading or writing any Arabic language materials; uttering in public any Arabic expression such as *al-hamdulillah or Allah-u Akbar*; acting 'strange' on Thursday evenings by changing the linen, or on Fridays by bathing and dressing in clean clothes; wrapping a corpse in a clean shroud before burial; or even for dyeing the hair and staining fingers and hands with henna. Bathing practices were especially suspect as the washing of all parts of the body, for example, would clearly identify one as a Muslim deserving severe punishment.

Ritual book-burning is a category of biblioclasm, the wanton -- and often ceremonial -- destruction of books. Ximénes de Cisneros, who became Grand Inquisitor of Spain in 1507, demanded that Muslims hand over thousands of priceless hand-written Qur'ans and other Islamic texts, which were all publicly burnt in a great bonfire in October 1501.

The inquisitorial process was based on the assumed guilt of the accused; after all, why would a person have been arrested if he/she were not guilty? Whichever member of the family was initially brought before the Grand Inquisitor for the crime of heresy, the resultant trial would invariably ensnare the entire family. Denial of guilt usually resulted in one's burning at the stake.

The Spanish Inquisition was intrusive in the everyday lives of *Moriscos*. Its agents would enter houses and force children to denounce their parents for reading the Noble Qur'an, or making the ritual ablutions.

Of the tens of thousands of Muslims forcibly indoctrinated into the Catholic rites, most were suspected of being Christian in name only. *Morisco* boys, in particular, were taught by Jesuit priests and those found most competent were selected to become missionaries to their *Morisco* brethren. In fact, the Catholic Church was intended to replace parents as the teachers of their children.

Oran *Fatwa* 1504

After the year 1500, life would never be the same for the Muslims of Spain. Muslims in North Africa and elsewhere were aware of the plight of their brothers and sisters-in-faith in Al-Andalus. *Moriscos* had sent emissaries to the Mamluks in Cairo and the Turks in Istanbul, but regional conflicts prevented any full-scale help from being offered to them.

The forced baptisms had started and many Islamic communities throughout Al-Andalus had been deprived of their *imams*. Mosques and *madrasahs* were being closed and Muslims were being forced to attend mass regularly and take communion. What should a Muslim do?

In 1504, a *mufti* (a Muslim scholar who interprets the *Shari'ah* by giving legal opinions) in Oran (present-day Algeria) issued a *fatwa* (an Islamic religious ruling; a scholarly opinion on a matter of Islamic Law) intended for the persecuted Muslims of Spain who had sought advice from the *'ulama*. The *fatwa* offered heartfelt advice from an Islamic scholar who tried to empathize with the terrible plight of his brothers and sisters-in-faith living abroad in Al-Andalus. He advised the Muslims to do what they had to do; Allah was not concerned about external rituals, but with the intentions of one's heart.

Could the requirements of *Shari'ah* Law be relaxed considering the oppressive conditions under which the *Moriscos* were living? The *mufti* admonished the Muslims of Spain to continue offering ritual *salah* (prayers) even if it meant being forced to attend church and bow down before the Christian statues found there. One's intention should always be towards praising Allah alone and obtaining His pleasure. Sadly, the *mufti* addressed the *Moriscos* as 'outsiders' (Arabic *ghuraba'*), thereby inferring that Al-Andalus was no longer part of *Dar al-Islam*.

Many other Islamic scholars -- probably most -- would have advised the Moriscos to leave their tormented homeland in which Islam could not be practiced openly. But, the *Fatwa* of Oran must have given some hope to the suffering Muslims who were undergoing the most excruciating tests of their faith in لا إله إلا الله محمد رسول الله. And it must have been popular as a copy of it dated 1563 has been found and even older copies of this same *fatwa* have been found translated into *aljamiado* (Old Spanish, the *Moriscos*' common language, written using the Arabic alphabet).

Final Expulsion of the *Moriscos*

During the 16th century, the *Moriscos* revolted against the reign of terror that was destroying their lives. In 1568, for example, the Muslims fought against the Catholic state in remote mountain regions of Spain. They were aided in their resistance by some North Africans and a small group of Ottoman soldiers[29] sent from Algiers. The uprising ended in 1570 with the forced relocation of the remaining *Moriscos* to remoter parts of the country.

Towards the end of the 16th century, it was clear that the attempt at assimilating the *Moriscos* into the dominant Christian culture of Spain had failed. Some members of the Church still believed that assimilation was possible[30], but the king and others possibly feared an invasion of combined Ottoman and North African forces to help the *Moriscos* re-establish an Islamic state in Al-Andalus. It was decided, therefore, to draw up a 'final solution' to the problem of the *Moriscos*.

One option considered was the mass extermination of the entire *Morisco* community, but the fear of angering *Dar al-Islam* prevented its adoption. Other options on the table included the enslavement of all *Moriscos*; the establishment of ghettos for the *Morisco* population; and the use of all male *Moriscos* as galley slaves. In the end, it was decided to expel the last remaining Muslims from Spanish territory. Edicts to this effect were issued between 1609 and 1614.

Many *Morisco* families suffered one last indignation as they were about to leave their homeland for good: all infant children were taken from their mothers' arms and were later placed in the foster care of 'Old Christians' who would rear them in the Catholic tradition.

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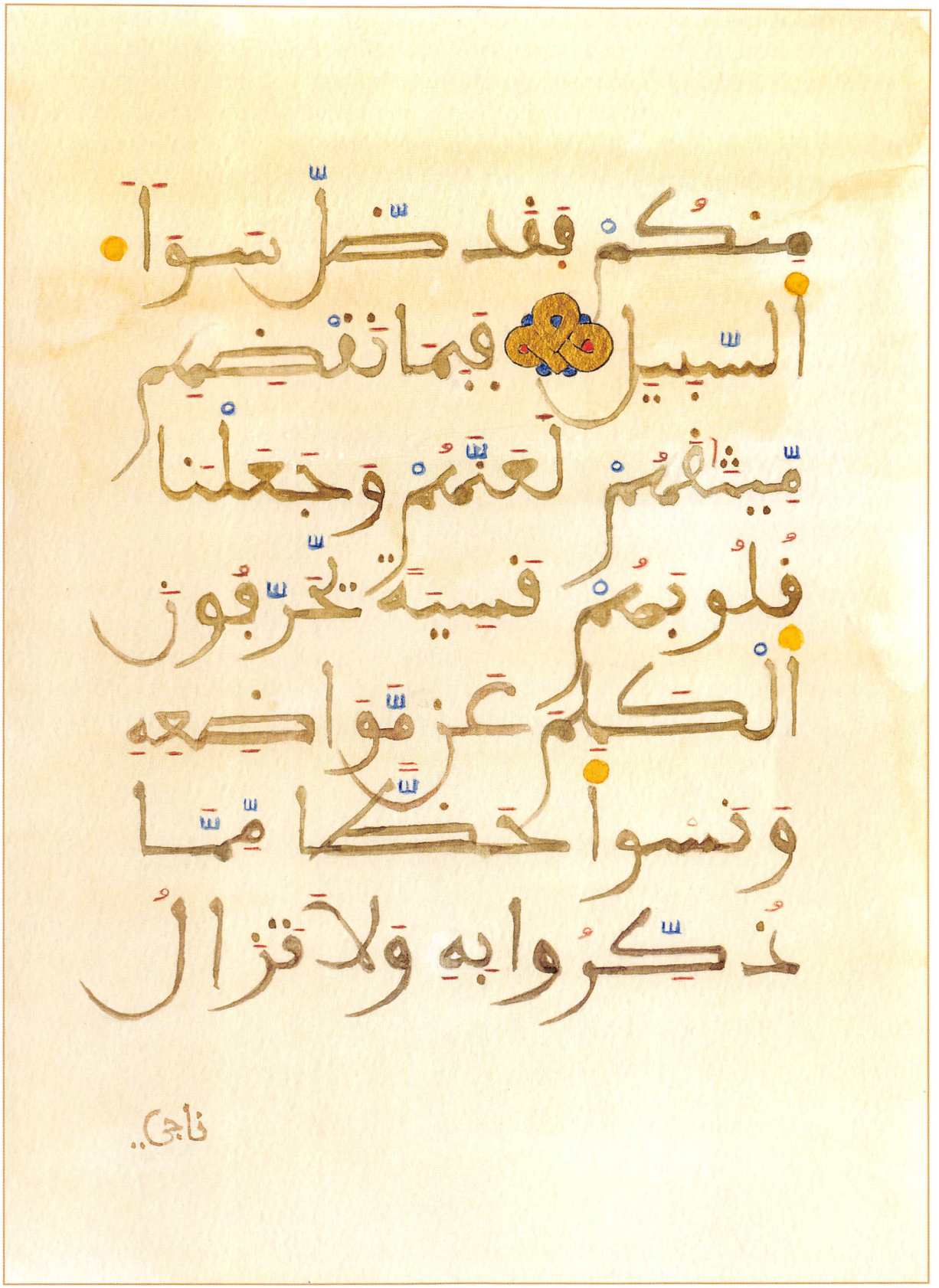
[29]No large Ottoman support for the Moriscos ever materialized as the Ottomans were preoccupied in stabilizing Cyprus and in defending their eastern borders with Safavid Iran.

[30]Some Spaniards thought it shameful that Spain converted infidels in far-off Chile and China, yet couldn't successfully Christianize baptized *Moriscos* at home.



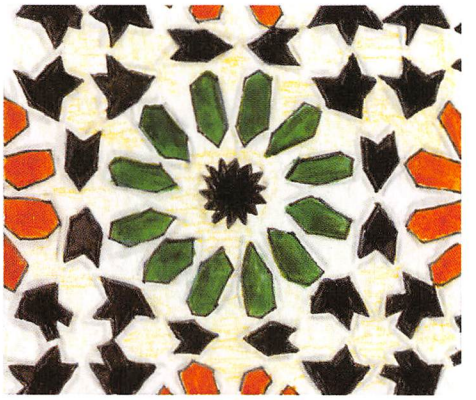
The number of exquisite handwritten Qur'ans that had to be produced for the large Muslim population of Al-Andalus can only be imagined. Sadly, today, the number of extant Qur'ans from Muslim Spain barely approaches two dozen. The book-burning terror tactics employed by Cisneros and his Inquisition effectively signaled the end of Islam as an open public religion in Granada. (*Surah Al-Ma'idah*: 12-13)

Ships were readied at prescribed ports and the sad spectacle of the deportation of hundreds of thousands of innocent Muslims from their place of birth proceeded. It must be said that some *Moriscos* left Spain willingly. Some were grateful to be leaving and sincerely believed their lives would improve upon arrival in North Africa[31], Egypt, northern Greece or Turkey. It is ironic that some *Morisco* émigrés were settled by Ottoman authorities in Syria -- the homeland of the founders of the Cordovan Caliphate more than eight hundred years before.

In 1614, the last surviving members of the Banu Hud family assembled outside the city gates of Granada; the patriarch kept the keys to the family's home in his vest pocket. Many neighbours had also assembled at the gates and were busy quickly selling, for a song, anything of value they had. Hundreds of others were now having to contemplate never seeing their beloved homeland ever again.

The six hundred year old well-travelled Qur'an was still the most precious possession of the Banu Hud. When leaving their home for the last time, family members were very careful to place their Qur'an in a thick leather case. This was then hidden beneath the heavy cloak of the Banu Hud patriarch.

The long years of unjust religious persecution had taken their toll on the Muslim community. For some, travelling to a new home -- and possible uncertain future in *Dar al-Islam* -- was preferable to residing in Spain whose intolerance to anything but Catholicism, had put their lives in jeopardy for so long. For others, the loss of their blessed Al-Andalus was so overwhelming that the pain felt in exile almost equaled the suffering they had experienced in inquisitorial Spain.



[31]Morocco, just across the narrow Strait of Gibraltar from Al-Andalus, was, of course, the nearest destination for *Moriscos*. Many did choose to settle in North African towns such as Fez, Tetuan and Tlemcen, where their descendents reside in 'Andalusian' quarters and are still referred to as *al-Andalusiyyun* ('the Andalusians').

Chapter Nine

The Catholic Monarchs of Spain had failed to learn the lesson of the Spanish Umayyad caliphs of the 10th century. Multiculturalism[32] and tolerance of other faiths -- or *convivencia* -- had resulted in unrivaled prosperity that was the envy of the rest of the world. In their maniacal pursuit of religious unity in Spain, the Catholic Monarchs had indeed cleansed the land of Jews, Muslims and Protestant Christians, but in the process had doomed Spain to material, intellectual and spiritual impoverishment.

By the time of the re-conquest of the Iberian peninsula in the late 15th century, Arabic was no longer the spoken language of the majority of Spanish Muslims. It had been replaced by a mediaeval form of Spanish.

Aljamiado Texts

To help keep alive the traditions and teachings of Islam and to preserve their Islamic heritage, the *Moriscos*, in the secrecy of their own homes, wrote books in dialects of Spanish and Portuguese, but using the Arabic alphabet. The Spanish/Portuguese term given to these writings is *aljamiado*, which is a corruption of the Arabic '*ajamiyah* ('foreigner' عجمية). *Aljamiado* texts mostly discussed a variety of topics: religion, history and legends. They were written from the late 15th until the early 17th centuries -- the period when *Moriscos* were under extreme duress, being hounded by the Inquisition and punished for any lapses in their adherence to their forcibly adopted faith.

As the reading, writing and speaking of Arabic were forbidden, *Moriscos* very secretly produced these documents in the privacy of their homes, beyond the prying eyes of the Iquisition. *Aljamiado* texts were just one last attempt -- despite all the odds -- by the oppressed Muslim population of Spain to maintain their identity. In these strange writings, employing a secret script, known only to the initiated, *Moriscos* were able to express their deepest convictions. *Aljamiado* literature contains prophetic accounts of *Moriscos* surviving the exile and being able to return to Spain, where they could once again freely practice their Islamic faith. Qur'ans were also written in Arabic with interlinear *aljamiado* translations.

Aljamiado texts provide a unique opportunity for us today to understand what was important in the lives of *Moriscos*. In order to avoid detection from the authorities, *Moriscos* would hide copies of the Noble Qur'an and other writings in Arabic in special cupboards, under false floorboards, in walls, or in secret attics. In the 20th century, hundreds of such *aljamiado* texts came to light in old Spanish houses that were either being renovated or demolished. These hidden *aljamiado* libraries clearly highlight the importance of the home, which became the

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[32]It is also truly unfortunate that the Catholic Monarchs never bothered to look further east and opt for a multicultural society like that of the Ottoman Turks, whose tolerance towards and acceptance of their Christian and Jewish minorities -- exemplified by the *Pax Ottomanica* -- were a hallmark of their six hundred year-long history.

To help keep alive the traditions and teachings of Islam and to preserve their Islamic heritage, the *Moriscos*, in the secrecy of their own homes, wrote books in dialects of Spanish and Portuguese, but using the Arabic alphabet. Qur'ans were also secretly copied in Arabic with interlinear *aljamiado* translations. This page from a rare *Morisco* Qur'an depicts *Sural Al-Fatihah* with an interlinear *aljamiado* translation.

Moriscos' mosque and *madrasah*, an oasis where the Islamic faith was honoured and preserved. We can learn more about the hopes and fears of this last Muslim community on Spanish soil as more and more of these valuable texts are discovered and translated.

Some *aljamiado* books became extremely popular with *Moriscos*. The *aljamiado* version of the Qur'anic story of Yusuf ﷺ was one such text. Another popular *aljamiado* book was the *Breviario Sunni*, a survey of the principal commandments and obligations according to the Qur'an and *Sunnah* -- a manual of Islamic faith and practice. This book was intended to help guide Muslim communities living in Spain under Christian rule. It was copied and secretly distributed by Muslims throughout the 16th century.

The foremost contemporary historian of the *Moriscos*, L. P. Harvey, has translated portions of the *Breviario Sunni*, the amazing compendium of Islamic faith. One brief selection is reproduced below.

> It is your Creator alone whom you must adore, attributing to Him no likeness or semblance, and honouring His well-chosen and fortunate Muhammad ﷺ. Keep clean at all times by ritual ablution and by purity; observe the five daily prayers ... Defend the religion with your person and property. Honour your neighbour, though he be an outsider, a relative, or an unbeliever. Do not eat ham, or carrion flesh, or blood, or any thing offered up on an altar to Allah's creature. ... Do not keep company with bad Muslims. ... Learn the Law, and teach it to everybody, for you may be called to account for this on Judgement Day, and cast into the fire.[33]

Effects of *Morisco* Expulsion

After the year 1614, theoretically there were no longer any practicing Muslims in the Iberian Peninsula. All vestiges of the Muslims, whose contributions to the region had made the land prosper as no other, had been removed. The exodus of so many skilled and industrious workers left Spain's agro-economy in ruins, as whole sections of the country became depopulated.

Although many of the exiled *Moriscos* eventually flourished in their new homelands, the tragic events leading to their expulsion from Spain were never forgotten. Indeed, even today, in the 'Andalusian' quarters of many North African towns and cities, descendents of *Moriscos* living there still proudly claim Spanish ancestry[34].

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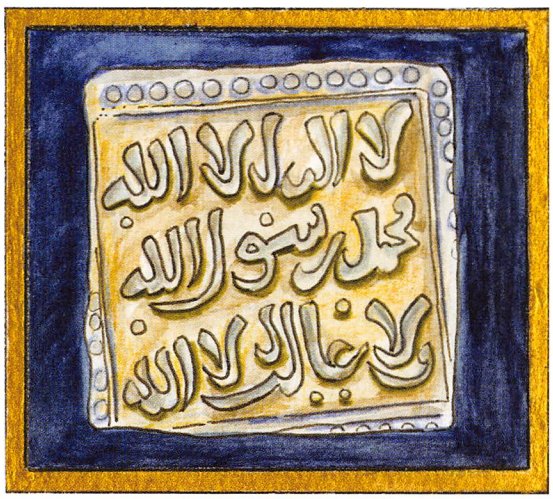
[33]Harvey, L. P. *The Literary Culture of the Moriscos, 1492-1609: A Study Based on the Extant Manuscripts in Arabic and Aljamía,* dissertation, Oxford University, *1958*.

[34]Interestingly, there is a movement in Spain today asking the government to grant Spanish citizenship to the millions of *Morisco* descendents living in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Turkey. They are asking, on behalf of the descendents of *Moriscos*, for their 'right to return' to be recognized.

The Spanish Inquisition finally ceased its operations in 1834, but it was only three years after the death of the dictator Francisco Franco in 1975, that Catholicism was dropped as the state religion. So, today in Spain, once again, a Muslim can freely profess his Islamic faith in لا إله إلا الله محمد رسول الله .

Our well-travelled Qur'an sailed away from Al-Andalus with the sole surviving members of the Banu Hud family. That Qur'an, hand-written in Cordoba during the golden age of the caliphate, represented the nine hundred year-long legacy of Muslim presence in Spain. For the Banu Hud and all subsequent owners, it would forever be clear proof of the endurance of *Kalam Allah*.



The Nasrid motto, "There is no Victor but Allah!" (و لا غالب الا الله), can be seen repeated thousands of times on decorative inscriptions throughout the Alhambra Palace. The same motto was also very frequently placed on Nasrid gold and silver coins.

Chapter Ten

Expelling hundreds of thousands of *Moriscos* did pose a dilemma for the Spanish authorities. All the children of *Moriscos* had been baptized; they could not, in theory, be exiled to a Muslim land. Some *Moriscos* were, therefore, sent across the border to Christian France. A few Christian *Moriscos* did settle there, or in Italy, while the rest chose North African destinations.

The Banu Hud boarded a ship in Denia -- a seaport in southern Spain -- and sailed to Ceuta (Arabic *Sabta*) on the northern coast of Morocco. It was from here in 710, that the Byzantine governor Julian had urged Musa ibn Nusayr and Tariq ibn Ziyad to consider an expedition to Spain. Now, ironically, Muslims were returning to the same port from which their ancestors had left nine hundred years earlier.

Reception of Exiled *Moriscos*

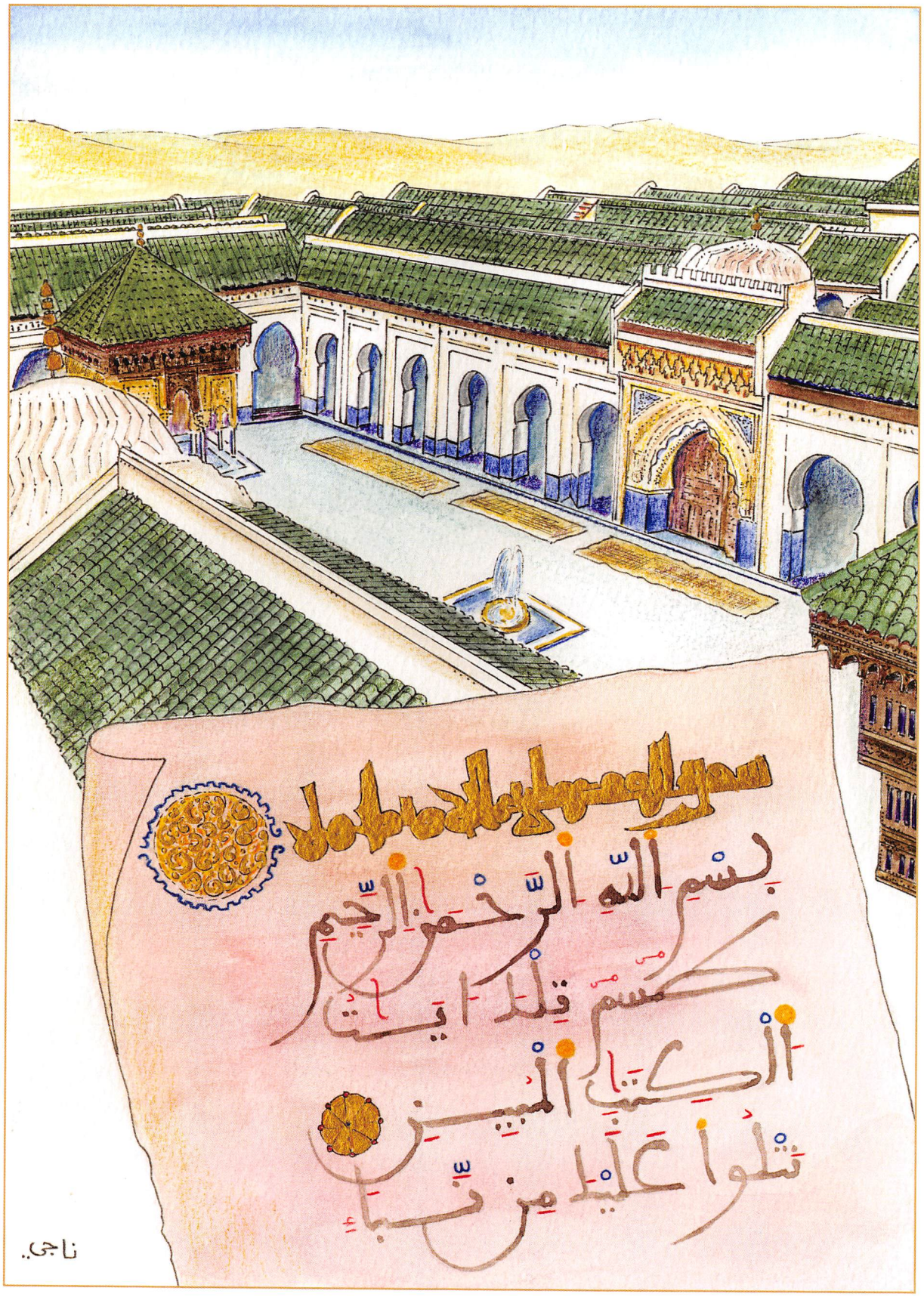
For the most part, *Moriscos* were well-received in Morocco by their fellow Muslims. For years, their plight had been monitored by North Africans, many of whom were grateful that the *Moriscos* were now free of their oppressors. The Banu Hud family had been reduced to about fifteen members. With the pieces of family gold that had been sewn inside their clothes, they hoped to make a new life for themselves in the city of Fez, a Moroccan city every Spanish Muslim had dreamed of visiting.

Over centuries, the Muslims of Spain had created a book culture in which learning was encouraged and respected. The *madrasahs* and mosques of Al-Andalus had attracted scholars of renown and students of great promise. During the 16th century, it had been impossible to receive a formal Islamic education in Spain, but three teenage boys from the Banu Hud family were at least able to read and write Arabic. They hoped that, with further tuition, they might be admitted into the great *Jami'ah al-Qarawiyyin*, the most prestigious seat of Islamic learning in all of North Africa.

Islam encouraged learning from its inception. According to Ibn Hazm (died 1064), the esteemed scholar of Al-Andalus, the intelligent person needs to search for knowledge through listening, reading and writing. Many *ahadith* reiterate the same theme: the virtues of the knowledge of the Qur'an and *Sunnah*, learnt and taught for the Pleasure of Allah. For example, according to Abu Bakra ﷺ, the Prophet ﷺ said:

> You should be a scholar, or a student, or a listener, or a lover of *'ilm* and scholars, and you should not be a fifth which makes you perish … The fifth point is to hate *'ilm* and its people. (*Al-Tabarani*)

And according to Ibn Mas'ud ﷺ, the Prophet ﷺ said:



The great Qarawiyyin Mosque/University (جامعة القرويين) complex in the heart of the Old City of Fez, Morocco was established in 859, which makes it the oldest degree-granting university in the world; it is more than a century older than Cairo's Al-Azhar, founded by the Fatimids in 975. (*Surah Al-Qasas*: 1)

> Envy is permitted only into two cases: A man to whom Allah gives wealth and who disposes of it rightfully; and a man to whom Allah gives knowledge which he applies and teaches. (*Al-Bukhari and Muslim*)

Finally, according to Abu Hurairah ﷺ, the Prophet ﷺ said:

> He who does not acquire knowledge with the sole intention of seeking the Pleasure of Allah, but does so for worldly gain, will not smell the fragrance of *Jannah* on the Day of Resurrection. (*Abu Da'ud and Al-Tirmidhi*)

In Islam, both teacher and pupil have been encouraged to strive for the betterment of all. It is important to gain knowledge and then practice and impart it to others. A real Muslim is one who has understood the true meaning of his religion; indeed, one becomes a Muslim only through knowledge, not through birth.

North African *madrasahs*, like similar ones that had flourished in Al-Andalus, were serious centres of learning, where all the admonishments of the Prophet ﷺ were honoured and the Qur'anic *du'a*: 'My Rabb (Lord)! Increase me in knowledge.' رب زدني علماً (*Tâ-Hâ*:114), was sincerely offered with the raised palms of both young and old.

Muslims were the progenitors of educational institutions as we known them today. With their profound faith in لا إله إلا الله محمد رسول الله and guidance from the Noble Qur'an and *Sunnah*, Muslims were able to succeed and develop the most sophisticated educational centres the world had ever seen. In fact, Muslims established the oldest continuously operating institution of higher learning in the world.

Qarawiyyin Mosque/University

The great Qarawiyyin Mosque/University (جامعة القرويين) complex in the heart of the Old City of Fez, Morocco was established in 859, which makes it the oldest degree-granting university in the world; it is more than a century older than Cairo's Al-Azhar, founded by the Fatimids in 975. Fatimah al-Fihri ibn Muhammad, the daughter of a wealthy businessman from Qayrawan, Tunisia, arrived in Fez in the early 9th century. She, along with her family, settled in a part of the city inhabited by émigrés from Qayrawan. On the death of her father, the well-educated Fatimah al-Fihri, decided to use her sizeable inheritance to build a mosque complex the city would treasure for years to come. The fact that 1,150 years ago, an educated, pious Muslimah used her own wealth to propagate higher education in her own tiny world should not go unnoticed -- especially when today, some Muslimahs are being denied basic universal education.Within a century of its founding, the Qarawiyyin grew from being an important *madrasah*, teaching Islamic sciences, to a renowned world-class university with even

non-Muslim alumni[35] such as Ibn Maymun[36]. Not unlike the great translation schools of Toledo, the Qarawiyyin played an important role in the cultural exchange and transmission of knowledge from *Dar al-Islam* to Europe.

Qarawiyyin Curriculum

The university offered a very comprehensive, state-of-the-art curriculum. Its multidisciplinary departments graduated students in Islamic Law, *Hadith*, History, Mathematics, Astronomy, Chemistry, Medicine, Literature, and Grammar. The university was truly a 'font of knowledge', open to all. Classes were even offered to merchants, craftsmen and farmers who improved their skills by attending special seminars. However, the Qarawiyyin became so popular that entrance requirements had to be amended. For example, it was decided early on that all applicants had to be *hâfiẓ al-qur'ân*[37].

Since the 10th century, there had been close ties between the Qarawiyyin and the Cordovan Caliphate. 'Abd al-Rahman III, for example, paid for much of the cost of the first extension of the university. And there was a constant flow of students and scholars back and forth between these two seats of Islamic learning in the western corner of *Dar al-Islam*.

Upon the completion of one's studies, a degree (*ijazah*, or 'license', 'permission') was awarded. However, unlike European institutions, the Qarawiyyin *ijazah* was conferred by one's professor. There was no corporate body that issued degrees.

The Qarawiyyin University was still a functioning mosque. Professors would conduct their lessons inside the mosque whose floors were strewn with beautifully woven and scented reed mats[38]. Teachers would sit on heavy wooden chairs (*kursi*) and then proceed to politely lecture their students who had gatheted in front of them. Ritual prayers were offered communally at the proper times. Such was the stature of the Qarawiyyin, its muezzin would always be the first in the city to climb the minaret and recite the azan -- a custom which has continued to the present day. Both teachers and students had access to the university's famous library[39].

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[35] Although not alumni, the cartographer, Al-Idrisi (1110-1165?); the philosopher, Ibn 'Arabi (1165-1240); and the social historian, Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) were all somehow connected to the Qarawiyyin University as either part-time students or lecturers.

[36] Ibn Maymun, or Maimonides (1135-1204), was born in Cordoba and died in Cairo. He was one of the greatest Torah scholars, but was also a renowned physician – the greatest of his time, according to some. In Fez, Ibn Maymun received most of his secular education at the Qarawiyyin University.

[37] Interestingly, this stipulation is still in effect today (2009) for anyone seeking admission to the Department of Islamic Studies of the Qarawiyyin University.

[38] Each year new reed matting is commissioned from artisan workshops. In North Africa, these magnificent hand-woven mats have always been preferred to less practical woolen carpets.

[39] The recently renovated Qarawiyyin Library still holds a valuable manuscript collection including volumes of Imam Malik's الموطأ, *Al-Muwatta'*, written on parchment, and an original hand-written copy of Ibn Khaldun's, magnum opus, *Al-'Ibar*.

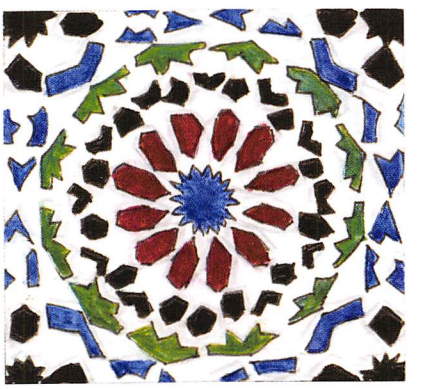
Many terms and customs, familiar to all attending a modern university, have their origins in Islamic seats of learning such as the Qarawiyyin in Fez. The 'Chair', i.e. the position held by a professor, is based on the concept alluded to earlier of the teacher sitting in front of his students; an 'academic circle' has the same origin. The wearing of academic 'robes' is another custom having Islamic roots. And the term 'doctorate', implying a 'license to teach' derives from the word 'doctor', a direct translation from the Arabic *mudarris*, the one who has received his *ijazat al-tadris* (i.e. 'license to teach').

Another tie linking Morocco to Al-Andalus is of course the catastrophe that befell the *Moriscos* in the 17th century. Thousands of émigrés chose towns in Morocco as their new homeland. These gifted scholars, artisans, engineers, and farmers all contributed greatly to their new societies.

The Banu Hud were welcomed into the *Hay al-Andalusiyyin*, the 'Andalusian Quarter' of Fez by *Morisco* families that had preceded them into exile. The three sons of the Banu Hud patriarch settled in very well and after a year were granted admission to the Qarawiyyin University.

The well-travelled Qur'an breathed freely now. No longer hidden in wall closets or attics, it rested in the open on a shelf and was read every morning and evening by the male members of the family. During the day, mothers used the same Noble Qur'an to teach their children to read. During the long nights of Ramadhan, the well-travelled Qur'an was taken to the Qarawiyyin Mosque where it was read continually until the morning prayers.

Masha'Allah, the well-travelled Qur'an had survived a perilous journey. The Banu Hud were living witnesses to the endurance of *Kalam Allah* and they celebrated it.



Chapter Eleven

The Banu Hud family prospered in Fez. Their two sons graduated from the Qarawiyyin University and, like so many of their ancestors, became Islamic scholars of great renown.

The well-travelled Qur'an remained safely protected in the family's courtyard mansion in the Andalusian Quarter of the city. Many families like the Banu Hud had fled the persecution in Al-Andalus and had settled in Fez. In Morocco, they were able to preserve many of their old customs. On special days, such as weddings and the two *'eids*, unique Andalusian-style clothes would be worn and delicious sweetmeats and pastries -- all made according to traditional *Morisco* recipes -- would be carefully prepared and eagerly eaten. The *Moriscos* also kept alive their love of poetry. Many of the Andalusian exiles in Fez were accomplished poets who wrote nostalgic poems about their long-lost homeland of Al-Andalus.

The well-travelled Qur'an, now seven hundred years old, continued to be read each morning and evening by the male members of the Banu Hud. During the day, the women folk would read it and use it for the noble task of teaching their grand-children *Kitab Allah* and the Arabic language. According to 'Uthman ibn 'Affan ﵁, the Prophet ﷺ said:

خَيْرُكُمْ مَنْ تَعَلَّمَ الْقُرْآنَ وَ عَلَّمَهُ.

The best among you [Muslims] are those who learn
the Qur'an and teach it to others. (*Al-Bukhari*)

And according to Ibn Mas'ud ﵁, the Prophet ﷺ said:

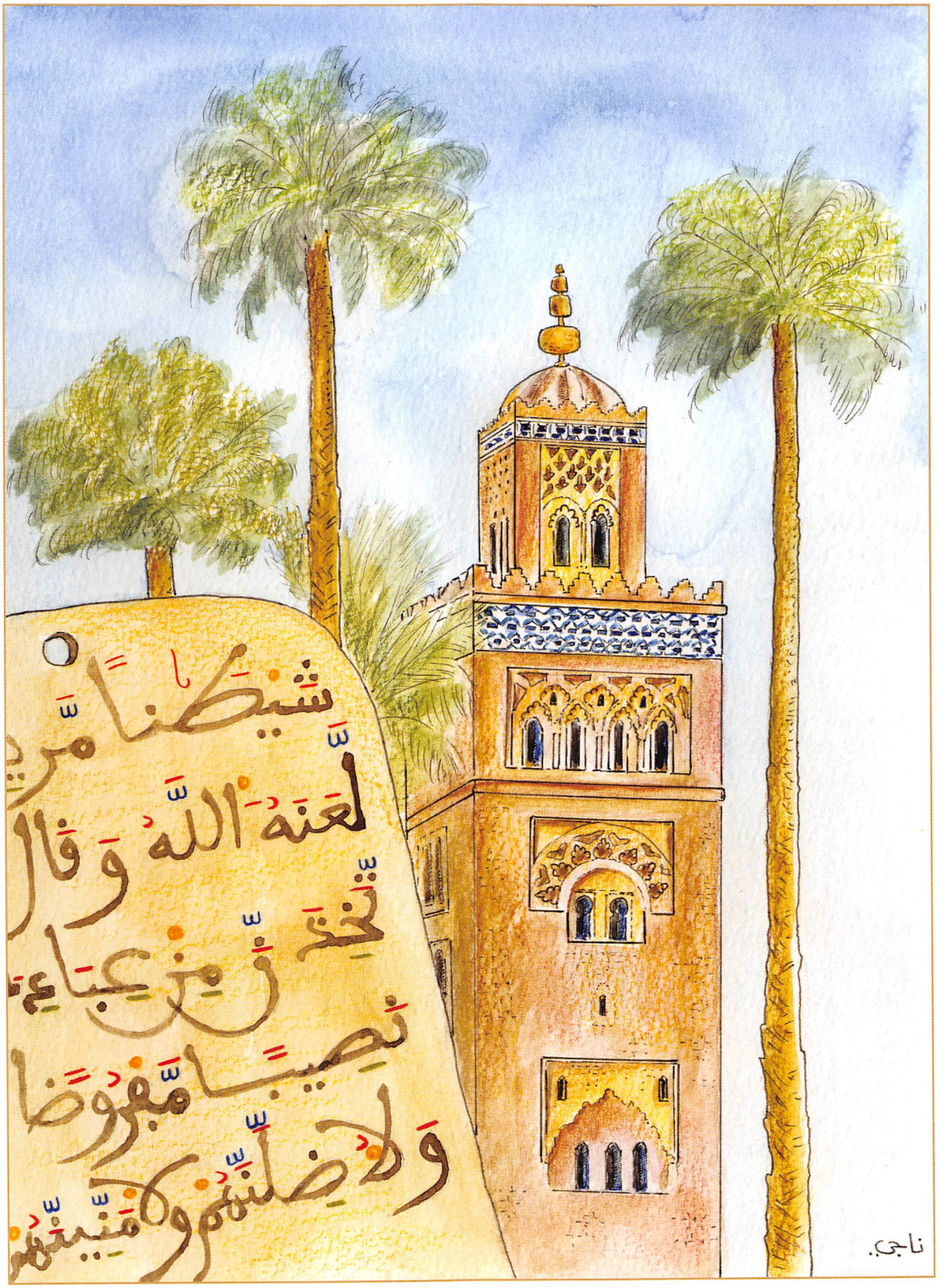
إِنَّ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ مَأْدُبَةُ اللهِ فَتَعَلَّمُوا مِنْ مَأْدُبَةِ اللهِ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ.

The Noble Qur'an is a Divine Banquet; thus benefit [learn]
from it as much as you can. (*Al-Tabarani, Al-Bazaar*)

Arrival of Islam in Morocco

Islam arrived in Northwest Africa in the 7th century. In 681, 'Uqba ibn Nafi' (died 683), the great Arab general and founder of Qayrawan in Tunisia, reached Morocco. He spent the rest of his life spreading the message of *Din al-Haq al-Islam* to the peoples of North Africa. He travelled as far as the Atlantic coast (in present-day Morocco) and there, he rode his horse into the pounding ocean waves and asked Allah to be his witness:

> O, Allah! If this sea of darkness had not appeared before me, I would have gone on to the unknown kingdoms of the West, preaching the unity of Thy Holy Name.



Dominating the city and towering some 70 metres above it, is the magnificent minaret of the Kutubiyyah Mosque, completed in 1158 by the Almohad ruler 'Abd al-Mu'min. In front of the mosque was a famous book market which also offered newly made wooden writing boards (*lawhah*), used by local children when learning *Kalam Allah*. (*Surah Al-Nisa'*: 117-119)

The first Arab kingdom in the region was founded by Idris I (ruled 789-791), the great grandson of Hassan ﷺ, son of 'Ali ﷺ. Idris sought shelter in far-off Morocco after the 'Abbasids defeated the 'Alid forces in the Battle of Fakhkh in 787. Idris soon gained support amongst the Berber[40] tribes, one of which he married into. He founded the Idrisid dynasty which played a major role in Islamizing this part of North Africa. His son, Idris II (Idris ibn Idris ibn 'Abd Allah) founded the city of Fez in 808.

Berber Dynasties

The appearance of two indigenous Berber dynasties in Northwest Africa, beginning in the 11th century, was a direct result of the need to reinvigorate the waning Islamic spirit of many Berber communities.

The Almoravids were the first dynasty to establish an empire in Morocco. They came from the deserts of the far south and spread their pure form of Islam, based solely on the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet ﷺ, east to Algeria and north into Spain. The city of Marrakesh was founded as the Almoravid capital by their great leader, Yusuf ibn Tashfin and was beautified by his son, 'Ali ibn Yusuf. The Almoravids successfully united the various desert and mountain tribes of Morocco for the first time in history.

Within a century, a second Berber dynasty, the Almohads -- from the High Atlas mountains -- replaced the Almoravids. The Almohads ruled their empire from Marrakesh, which by the end of the 12th century had become an important centre of Islamic learning with many schools and libraries. There were also flourishing economic and cultural ties with Al-Andalus. Some of Spain's finest philosophers, physicians and artisans ended up in Marrakesh at the court of the Almohad caliph. Ibn Tufayl (died 1185), the great philosopher and writer of *Hayy ibn Yaqdhan*[41], worked at the royal court as the resident physician. And Ibn Tufayl's friend, Ibn Rushd (died 1198), famous for his commentaries on Aristotle, spent his final years in Marrakesh.

Marrakesh is a city of sprawling verdant gardens of olive, fig, apricot, orange and date groves -- all watered by centuries old irrigation channels; its buildings and ten kilometer long city walls are made of red compacted earth. As a backdrop, the peaks of the snow-covered Atlas Mountains loom high over the fertile plains.

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[40] Berbers are the ethnic group considered to be the indigenous inhabitants of North Africa. They inhabit the areas from the Atlantic coast of Morocco to the distant Siwa oasis of western Egypt. Their unique language still puzzles linguists who have yet to establish a definitive link with any other living language. The term 'Berber' derives from the Latin *barbari* via the ancient Greek *barbaroi* (uncivilized, non-Greek peoples). The Berbers, however, have always used the term *Imazighen* (freemen) to identify themselves.

[41] Ibn Tufayl's (1105?-1185) allegorical tale of a child nurtured by a doe and brought up without any human contact is considered to be the first novel in the Arabic language. The book, of less than a hundred pages, had an immense influence on Arabic and European literature. An English translation of *Hayy ibn Yaqdhan* likely inspired Daniel Defoe to write his *Robinson Crusoe*.

Dominating the city and towering some 70 metres above it, is the magnificent minaret of the Kutubiyyah Mosque, completed in 1158 by the Almohad ruler 'Abd al-Mu'min. Like Al-Andalus, Morocco embraced the culture of the book and, indeed, this mosque owes its name to the hundred *kutubiyyun*, or booksellers, who set up shop in the mosque's forecourt. In addition to the Qur'an and compilations of *ahadith*, this book market also offered newly made wooden writing boards (*lawhah*). The local children used these when learning to write Arabic and verses from *Kitab Allah*.

Moroccan *Madrasahs*

For hundreds of years, mosques were the centres of Islamic education in Al-Andalus and Morocco. In the 'Far West' of the Islamic world, there was no government-sponsored programme like that of the Seljuq sultans, who established Nizamiyyah *madrasahs* in towns and cities throughout their empire.

The Almoravid dynasty had its origins in sub-Saharan Africa, in the *ribats*, or fortified religious hostels, which themselves offered a *madrasah*-type education to their occupants. The earliest true Moroccan *madrasah* was opened in Fez in the late 13th century, after the demise of the two Berber dynasties.

A foundation inscription from an early *madrasah* in Fez mentions the importance of teaching religious sciences.

> Praise be to Allah, the Master of the Two Worlds! Who exalts the status of men of learning, who recompenses with a generous hand those who devote themselves to acts of piety; who by means of *madrasahs* revives the vanished traces of *fiqh* and religion, using as His instrument those of His good servants who He has specially signaled out for His guidance …

Moroccan *madrasahs* are relatively small compared to ones elsewhere in *Dar al-Islam*; the reason might be the country's single *madhhab* (Maliki) that would preclude the need for a larger building with teaching areas for the other *madhhabs*.

The Moroccan *madrasah* was an extremely practical, yet elegant edifice. The ground floor always consisted of a central courtyard with a pool, or fountain, and a large *musallah*[42]. The first floor would have many small cells, which acted as both study area and dormitory. *Madrasahs* trained the *'ulama'*, so, not surprisingly, their patrons often included sultans.

[42] *Madrasahs* often functioned as neighbourhood mosques, some of which occasionally had minarets.

The most important feature of the Moroccan *madrasah* is the lavish decoration. Master artisans created aesthetic works of art: intricately carved stucco work, worked wood paneling, and entire walls covered in exquisite geometric tile work. All these elements created a harmonious balance and offered an oasis for contemplation in bustling, noisy sections of the city. This example of Moroccan artistry is a portion of a magnificent wall of tiles and stucco from the 'Ali bin Yusuf *Madrasah* in Marrakesh.

The most important feature of the Moroccan *madrasah* is the lavish decoration. Master artisans created aesthetic works of art: intricately carved stucco work, worked wood paneling, and entire walls covered in exquisite geometric tile work. All these elements created a harmonious balance and offered an oasis for contemplation in bustling, noisy sections of the city. Despite being the smallest in the Islamic world, Morocco's *madrasahs* undoubtedly exhibit the richest interior decoration.

The Banu Hud family became successful in their new homeland. Two of their sons graduated from the prestigious Qarawiyyin University. One son, Harun, became a well-known *mutakallim* (Muslim theologian; scholar of علم الكلام) and was asked by the sultan of Marrakesh to teach at the 'Ali Ben Yusuf *Madrasah* there. To be offered such a teaching position was a great honour and Harun did not hesitate to accept it.

After the fall of Granada in 1492, there had been a constant influx of émigrés from Al-Andalus to North African shores. Although most of the educated *Moriscos* arriving in Morocco preferred to settle in the northern towns of Tetuan, Fez and Tlemcen (in Algeria), some did venture south to Marrakesh. When Harun reached there, he was warmly greeted by the administrators of the 'Ali Ben Yusuf *Madrasah* as well as by a small group of fellow *Moriscos*.

Being the oldest member of the Banu Hud, Harun was now in possession of the well-travelled Qur'an. He, therefore, brought the treasured Qur'an with him to Marrakesh. During the many years that Harun taught Islamic theology there, he would frequently open the well-travelled Qur'an in front of his students. These were special days indeed as everyone could marvel at this magnificent copy of *Kitab Allah* -- a living example of the endurance of *Kalam Allah* -- that had survived so many catastrophes during its seven hundred year-long history.

Chapter Twelve

Harun, the Banu Hud scholar, became a celebrated teacher at the 'Ali bin Yusuf *Madrasah* in Marrakesh. Most students attending the *madrasah* were Moroccan-born, but some came from western Algeria and even from the Muslim lands of sub-Saharan Africa. Two of Harun's most diligent students were from Timbuktu, a city more than 1,600 km to the south of Marrakesh -- beyond the vast expanse of Sahara dunes. These students were brothers whose father was a *muhaddith*. On completion of their studies, they prepared to return home to Timbuktu[43]. They asked Harun if he would like to accompany them and be a guest of their father. Harun unhesitatingly accepted the invitation.

Journey from Marrakesh

A week later, Harun and his two former students joined a camel caravan heading south. Tuareg Berber nomads, carrying loads of ivory, gold or rock salt, regularly traversed the Sahara Desert trade routes. As the students were familiar with Tuareg customs and language, the journey proved all the more rewarding. Everyone travelled lightly, the goatskin bags of water being the heaviest load.

But, Harun also took the well-travelled Qur'an with him. This Qur'an had been in his family for centuries and he couldn't imagine ever leaving it behind in Marrakesh. After *fajr* prayer, in the coolness of the fresh morning air, Harun would remove his well-read Qur'an from its leather case and proceed to recite verses in the distinctive Andalusian *tajwīd*.

Berber Villages

Before reaching the sea of golden Sahara dunes, the caravan first passed through the بلد القصور (*balad al-qusūr*), the 'land of fortresses'. This region of southern Morocco, even today, is full of picturesque Berber villages enclosed in red mud walls. Unlike the Tuareg nomads, these Berbers were sedentary farmers who spoke a different dialect of the Berber language.

Berber Inscriptions

Outside of one Berber village, Harun noticed some peculiar rock inscriptions. The Tuareg nomads were proud to explain that these had been written by their ancestors hundreds of years before -- perhaps before the arrival of Islam. The unique alphabetic writing[44] was used for about a thousand years before the Arabs came to North Africa. Rock inscriptions of this sort can be found throughout the region. The language is written in horizontal lines from right to left.

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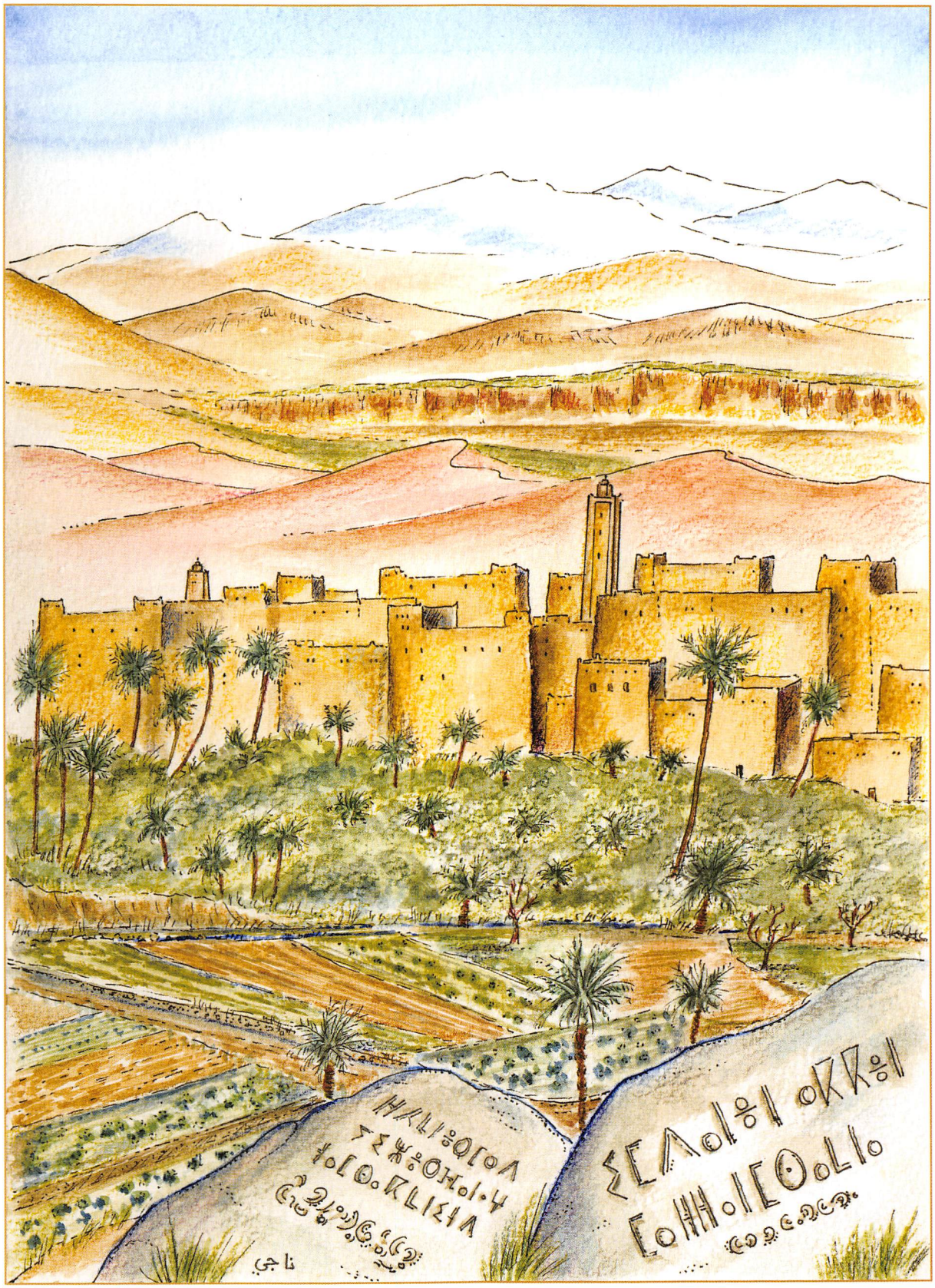
[43] Timbuktu is a fabled city in the West African state of Mali. Although it is somewhat of a backwater today, it has had a long and fascinating history.

[44] The alphabet is called *Tifinagh* and was invented by the Tuareg Berbers in prehistoric times. Since 2003, Moroccan primary school children have been taught their own Berber dialects using this alphabet.



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Several days after leaving the last Berber settlement, the weather got noticeably warmer and drier. Now, only waves of pink and gold sand dunes lay before them, and only the experienced Tuareg nomads could safely lead the caravan across the vast yellow sea.

Arrival in Timbuktu

Eight weeks after leaving Marrakesh, the camel caravan finally reached its destination: Timbuktu. Harun and his two students gave thanks to Allah for their safe arrival. It had been a grueling journey, but well worth it as they were now in a city famed for its Islamic culture and scholarship.

Legendary Timbuktu

Timbuktu was truly unique; it was an oasis of Islamic civilization at the very end of the Earth! The city was founded in the late 10th century as a way station for the local Tuareg nomads. Vast quantities of gold and salt passed through Timbuktu in the Middle Ages.

Islam first arrived when North African traders moved south in search of gold. Once sub-Saharan Africa started to embrace Islam, Arabic became the lingua franca for written communication[45]. Timbuktu soon became an important centre along the trans-Saharan trade routes founded by the Tuaregs. It was the ideal meeting point for local African populations and nomadic Berbers and Arabs coming from the north. In the 15th and 16th centuries -- and even before -- the city grew into an intellectual and spiritual capital for the whole of West Africa.

Cultural ties linked Andalusian and Moroccan centres of learning with Timbuktu, while the *Hajj* enabled scholars from West Africa to visit both the Al-Azhar in Cairo and the Holy Cities of the Hijaz.

Libraries and Book Markets

Today, the dozens of private libraries in Timbuktu preserve large collections of manuscripts[46] that attest to the high level of civilization reached by the Malian people. Timbuktu, for several centuries, was an unparalleled oasis of learning in the desert wastes of the Sahel. Literally millions of books were copied and traded in its book markets. Just as many cities in Al-Andalus had a flourishing book culture, Timbuktu had many resident bibliophiles and markets devoted to the sale of locally produced books as well as ones brought south by foreign traders.

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[45] The traditional *Maghrebī* custom of learning to write Arabic using wooden writing tablets (*lawha*) was also imported from the north. Children throughout Sahelian Africa still use this very practical method when learning verses from the Noble Qur'an.

[46] Some very rare manuscripts are found in these collections. Examples include an original copy of Ibn Khaldun's *'Ibār* and the only existing copy of a work by Ibn Rushd.

In these thriving booksellers' markets, copies of textbooks on disciplines as varied as botany and astronomy were available. It was only because of the many expert book copiers that so many individuals could build up large private libraries. The paper that fueled this intellectual activity was imported from Morocco, Al-Andalus, and later, Europe.

When the French invaded the Sahel in the 19th century, many notable families, who possessed manuscript libraries, feared their confiscation. Some even chose to hide their collections in the drifting sands surrounding Timbuktu. Such libraries are occasionally unearthed today and the dry, desert climate is one important factor attributable to the survival of so many fragile manuscripts.

These libraries are a living testament to the thriving literate Islamic culture that developed so long ago in such a remote part of *Dar al-Islam*. It was a culture in which scholars, book copiers and librarians were all honoured. Not unlike the *madrasahs* of the cosmopolitan towns and cities of Al-Andalus, Timbuktu also attracted foreign and homegrown scholars to teach in its many colleges.

Timbuktu Mosques

Timbuktu is a typical desert town exhibiting many outstanding examples of traditional earth architecture. The Great Mosque, for example, has half-metre thick walls of sun-baked bricks coated with mud plaster. They provide excellent insulation from the heat during the daytime, and transfer absorbent heat in the evening. A unique characteristic of West African mud construction is the insertion of bundles of palm branches into the walls. These are used to help reduce surface cracking, but also as scaffolding when annual repairs are needed. Such mosques are elegant examples of functional earth architecture and a testament to the creativity of the local Muslim artisans.

The Sankore *Madrasah*-University[47] is the oldest centre of Islamic learning in Timbuktu and over many centuries, it was able to amass a vast library of priceless manuscripts. When Harun of the Banu Hud family visited this remote part of Africa, the book culture there was truly alive and well. Scholars at the university were competent writers, producing their own books which were eagerly sought after. The city's golden age is forever preserved in the following West African proverb:

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[47] The Sankore University was founded by Mansa Musa (died 1337), the famous king of the Mali Empire. He also established Islam as the national religion. Mansa Musa is most remembered for his famous pilgrimage to Makkah in 1324. His camel caravan was laden with two tons of gold and, on reaching Cairo, he distributed so much of it that the value of the precious metal fell and did not recover for more than ten years!

Timbuktu is a typical desert town exhibiting many outstanding examples of traditional earth architecture. The Great Mosque, for example, has half-metre thick walls of sun-baked bricks coated with mud plaster. The traditional *Maghrebī* custom of learning to write Arabic using wooden writing tablets (*lawha*) was imported from the north. Children throughout Sahelian Africa still use this very practical method when learning verses from the Noble Qur'an. (*Surah Al-Fatihah*)

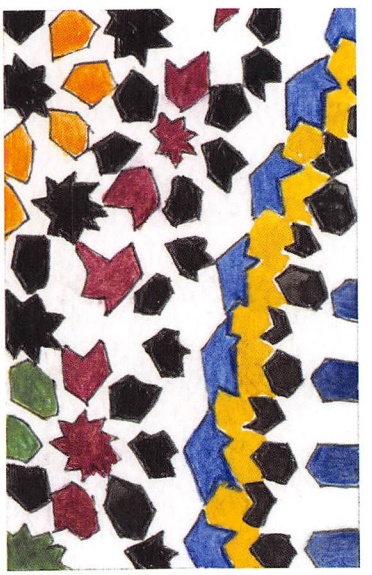
"Salt comes from the north, gold from the south, but the Word of Allah and the treasures of wisdom come from Timbuktu."

Harun marveled at the scholarship of the local *mu'allimun* and *fuqaha'* with whom he frequently held discussions in their mosques and *madrasahs*. Time passed quickly in Timbuktu, and after a month, Harun began to prepare for his journey back to Marrakesh. Along with his treasured well-travelled Qur'an, he had three other books he wanted to take home. These were all beautiful copies of the Qur'an written in the local *sūdānī*[48] script.

The last evening in Timbuktu was memorable as the entire community of religious scholars in the city had organized a banquet for Harun. After eating dinner, he was asked to read from his well-travelled Qur'an. This he proceeded to do by opening to the *Surah Yā-Sīn* and reciting in his clear Andalusian *tajwīd*.

بِسْمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحْمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

يسٓ ﴿١﴾ وَٱلْقُرْءَانِ ٱلْحَكِيمِ ﴿٢﴾ يس: ١ – ٢



[48] The *sūdānī* script originated in Timbuktu and has become the predominant script from Mauritania to Sudan. *Sūdānī* shares many of the *maghrebī* characteristics, but its letters are uniquely thick and densely written. Children all over West Africa learn to read the Noble Qur'an by writing verses on wooden boards. The ink is easily washed off the board once the *mu'allim* has inspected the writing.

Chapter Thirteen

Harun, of the Banu Hud, thoroughly enjoyed the dinner party held in his honour; he relished the lively discussions he had had with *mutakallimun* and *muhaddithun*. Timbuktu and its community of scholars had been very welcoming and had even offered him a teaching position at the Sankore University. But, after two months abroad, Harun looked forward to returning home to Marrakesh, where family, friends and work at the 'Ali bin Yusuf *Madrasah* all awaited him. Before falling asleep, Harun once again opened up the well-travelled Qur'an and began to read:

أَمَّن يَهْدِيكُمْ فِي ظُلُمَاتِ الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ - النمل: ٦٣

(Is not He [best] Who guideth you in the darkness of the land and sea?) *An-Naml*: 63

Indeed, Allah had guided and protected Harun every day of his long life.

During Harun's stay in Timbuktu, he had always woken up early and prayed the *fajr* prayer with the congregation in the local mosque. However, on his last morning in Timbuktu, Harun had failed to make it to the mosque. His two students noticed this and, on returning home, politely proceeded to Harun's bedside. There, they found him lying upright, still clutching the well-travelled Qur'an. He had suffered a hear attack and had quietly passed away in his sleep. The two students, both tearful, raised their palms in prayer and recited in unison:

كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ - آل عمران: ١٨٥

(Everyone shall taste death.) *Âl-'Imrân*: 185

إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ - البقرة: ١٥٦

(Truly, to Allah we belong and truly, to Him we shall return.) *Al-Baqarah*: 156

The funeral ceremony (*janazah* صلاة الجنازة) was held the same day, after *zuhr* prayer. The news had spread amongst the townspeople, and thousands came for the *janazah* prayer and to proceed to the burial grounds outside the city.

In 1610, as a young boy and a true son of Al-Andalus, Harun had been expelled from his homeland. During his long and eventful life, he had seen his world change in dramatic ways. In Spain, for example, he had witnessed unspeakable suffering and hardship. Governments rose and fell and nothing around him remained constant, except *Kalam Allah*, the Revelation from رب العلمين -- the enduring Message for all humanity.

In his life, Harun had held fast to the 'Rope of Allah' (حبل الله) and had been guided by the Noble Qur'an and *Sunnah* of the Prophet ﷺ.

Qur'an is *Kalam Allah*

The Qur'an is Allah's eternal message for humanity. In the Noble Qur'an, Allah tells us:

وَإِنْ أَحَدٌ مِّنَ ٱلْمُشْرِكِينَ ٱسْتَجَارَكَ فَأَجِرْهُ حَتَّىٰ يَسْمَعَ كَلَٰمَ ٱللَّهِ - التوبة: ٦

(And if anyone of the *Mushrikūn* seeks your protection, then grant him protection so that he may hear the Word of Allah [the Qur'an] ...) *At-Taubah*: 6

Despite attempts to falsify and denigrate *Kalam Allah*, it stands today as noble and miraculous as when it was revealed fourteen centuries ago. Its message is an unequivocal invitation to all of mankind to the worship of Allah, the one true Lord:

تَنزِيلُ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ ٱلْعَزِيزِ ٱلْحَكِيمِ ﴿١﴾ إِنَّآ أَنزَلْنَآ إِلَيْكَ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ بِٱلْحَقِّ فَٱعْبُدِ ٱللَّهَ
مُخْلِصًا لَّهُ ٱلدِّينَ ﴿٢﴾ الزمر: ١ - ٢

(The revelation of this Book [the Qur'an] is from Allah, the All-Mighty, the All-Wise. Verily, We have sent down the Book to you [O Muhammad ﷺ] in truth: So worship Allah [alone] by doing religious deeds for Allah's sake only.) *Az-Zumar*: 1-2

Preservation of *Kalam Allah*

Despite the biblioclasm of Cardinal Ximénes de Cisneros and the evils of his Inquisition, *Kalam Allah* survived in the hearts of hundreds of thousands of Spanish Muslims who, because of their belief in لا إله إلا الله محمد رسول الله , were forced into exile from their homeland in Al-Andalus.

In 16th century Spain, all Arabic books, including the Noble Qur'an, were banned. But, such was the faith in Islam of these last Muslims on Iberian soil, that copies of the Qur'an were physically preserved in secret cupboards and attics in the homes of countless *Morisco* families. When the end finally came, and the *Moriscos* were expelled en masse from their beloved Al-Andalus, copies of the Noble Qur'an, concealed under layers of clothing, were taken out of the country to safety.

The preservation of *Kalam Allah*, until the end of time, has been guaranteed by Allah:

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا ٱلذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُۥ لَحَٰفِظُونَ ﴿٩﴾ الحجر: ٩

(Verily, We it is Who have sent down the *Dhikr* [i.e. the Qur'an] and surely, We will guard it [from corruption].[49]) *Al-Hijr*: 9

Allah has kept the Qur'an with Him in *Jannah*.

بَلْ هُوَ قُرْءَانٌ مَّجِيدٌ ﴿٢١﴾ فِى لَوْحٍ مَّحْفُوظٍۭ ﴿٢٢﴾ البروج: ٢١ – ٢٢

(Nay, This is a Glorious Qur'an, [inscribed] in *Al-Lauh al-Mahfūdh* [the Preserved Tablet]!) *Al-Burūj*: 21-22

Banu Hud Qur'an

Harun of the Banu Hud family died in Timbuktu, far away from his land of birth. The well-travelled Qur'an remained in the house of Harun's two students, who perhaps had intended to return it to Harun's family in Marrakesh. But, centuries passed and the importance of Timbuktu as a great trading emporium and centre of Islamic scholarship waned. The once great city reverted to a sleepy, neglected desert town whose secrets lay hidden beyond the mud walls of its traditional buildings, or buried in the red sands of the Sahara.

Of the many public libraries and booksellers that once flourished in Timbuktu, nothing remained except private manuscript libraries that few had access to. Hundreds of thousands of priceless hand-written manuscripts were left hidden and unread in wooden trunks.

It has only been in the 20th century that the manuscript libraries of Timbuktu have been studied and their treasures revealed once again to the world. The manuscripts are today being carefully catalogued and digitally photographed, thus restoring the Islamic cultural legacy of this great African city.

As Arabic scholars gain access to these private libraries, more and more valuable manuscripts are being uncovered. The well-travelled Qur'an lay hidden beneath mounds of worm-eaten books in the bottom of an old wooden chest. The owner of the collection could not read or write Arabic well enough to realize its immense importance. Only when a professional restorer of manuscripts and an expert in reading *aljamiado* texts were called in to examine the book did the story of the well-travelled Qur'an become known to the world.

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[49] The Noble Qur'an, unlike the *Taurāt* (Torah) and the *Injil* (Gospel), has been preserved, letter-for-letter, and guarded from any additions, deletions, or alterations in the original text.

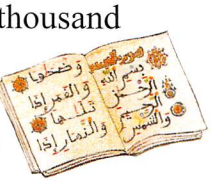
The well-travelled Qur'an lay hidden beneath mounds of worm-eaten books in the bottom of an old wooden chest. Only when a professional restorer of manuscripts and an expert in reading *aljamiado* texts were called in to examine the book did the story of the well-travelled Qur'an become known to the world. (last *ayah* of *Surah Al-Fath* and first *ayahs* of *Surah Al-Hujurat*)

The key to understanding the precious story of the well-travelled Qur'an lay on a special page that had been very carefully inserted into its thick leather binding. On this ancient sheet of Játiva paper, Harun's father -- almost a century before -- had written the full history of the well-travelled Qur'an until its arrival in Fez. The text had been written in the beautiful flowing *andalūsī* script using the secret language of the *Moriscos*: *aljamiado*. Harun brought the story up to date by providing details of the Qur'an's move to Marrakesh and Timbuktu.

Harun's Father's *Du'a*

Harun's father, the Banu Hud patriarch, had also written a long du'a, a special prayer asking Allah to protect and grant health and success to the present owners --whoever they might be -- of the well-travelled Qur'an. As an émigré, expelled from Al-Andalus, he obviously longed to return to his beloved homeland. His prayer ended with the hope that *insha'Allah*, one day, Al-Andalus might once again be a land where Muslims could freely practice their religion -- openly professing and inviting all to their belief in لا إله إلا الله محمد رسول الله. And he prayed that the family's well-travelled Qur'an might also return home and be a means by which newer generations of Spanish Muslims might learn *Kalam Allah*.

The full history of the *Moriscos* and their diaspora is still to be written; this book is but one page in their fascinating story. The well-travelled Qur'an, now more than nine hundred years old, is once again being read; its odyssey from Játiva to Cordoba, from Toledo to Granada and from there to Fez, Marrakesh and to the heart of Sahelian Africa has been chronicled here. But what is most remarkable, truly miraculous, in this amazing tale, is that after almost a thousand years, any Muslim able to read Arabic can read the well-travelled Qur'an as if it had been written yesterday! Allah in His Wisdom and Mercy, has indeed preserved His Word for humanity, and for all time. This book is meant as a celebration of its endurance.



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Paris
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Sabta
Fez
Qay'rawan
Mediterranean Sea
Cairo
Marrakesh
Timbuktu
The Well-Travelled Qur'an
The Paper Trail (Talas to Spain)
Route of Well-Travelled Qur'an

Black Sea
Caspian Sea
Syr Darya
Tashkent
Talas
Bukhara
Samarqand
Amu Darya
Euphrates
Tigris
Halab
Damascus
Baghdad
Isfahan
Jerusalem
Indus
Nile
Red Sea
Madinah
Makkah
Indian Ocean

Glossary

Abu 'Abd Allah: last king of Muslim Spain; ceded the Kingdom of Granada to the Catholic Monarchs in 1492

'Abd al-Rahman III: greatest of all the Spanish Umayyad rulers; reigned during the 'Golden Age' of caliphal Spain

Ahadith (sing. *hadith*): Arabic for the collected 'traditions', or reported deeds and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ

Alhambra: famous palace complex of the Nasrid kings of Granada, Spain

Aljamiado: name given to predominantly 16th century secret *Morisco* writings (in Spanish/Portuguese) that used the Arabic alphabet

Almagest: Ptolemy's famous book about mathematical astronomy; translated from Arabic into Latin by Gerard of Cremona in Toledo

Almohads: second of the great Berber dynasties; founded by Ibn Tumart in early 12th century; succeeded by Marinid dynasty of Morocco

Almoravids: name given to the first Berber dynasty in Morocco; survived for one hundred years; succeeded in 1147 by the Almohad Berbers

Alvaro: 9th century bishop of Cordoba who lamented the fact that most of the Christian youth in the region wrote and spoke better Arabic than Latin

Al-Andalus: Arabic for the Muslim territories of Spain and Portugal

Andalusī: unique style of writing Arabic used in Spain during the Muslim presence there

Al-Andalusiyyun: Arabic term for Muslim émigrés from Al-Andalus

Al-Azhar: famous university mosque in Cairo founded by the Fatimids in 975 CE

Bab al-Mardum: name of the small, extant mosque in the old part of Toledo, Spain

Al-Baycin: old Muslim quarter of Granada where uprisings occurred against the Spanish authorities after 1492

Bayt al Hikmah: Arabic for 'house of wisdom'; the famous translation centre in 'Abbasid Baghdad

Beni Nasr: founding family of Nasrid monarchs of Granada, the last Muslim kingdom in Spain

Berbers: original non-Arab inhabitants of North Africa; embraced Islam in the seventh century

Biblioclasm: practice of destroying books, often ceremoniously

Breviario Sunni: one of the most popular *aljamiado* books; a survey of the principal commandments and obligations according to the Qur'an and *Sunnah*

Catholic Monarchs: king Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain, who successfully cleansed the Iberian Peninsula of Jews, Muslims and heretical Christians

Cisneros, Ximénes de: powerful church leader who attempted to quicken the pace of Muslim conversions to Christianity in Granada by the public burning of Arabic books

Convivencia: Spanish term for the peaceful coexistence between Jews, Christians and Muslims in 10th century Al-Andalus

Cordoba: city in southern Spain; capital of the Spanish Umayyads

Crypto-Muslims: *Moriscos* in 16th century Spain who clandestinely continued to practice Islam despite edicts prohibiting such religious affiliations

Denia: Spanish Mediterranean seaport south of Valencia; many *Moriscos* were sent into permanent exile from here between 1609-1614

Fatimids: dynasty of Isma'ili caliphs who founded Cairo and the Al-Azhar in the 10th century; contemporaries of 'Abbasid and Spanish Umayyad caliphs

Fatimah al-Fihri: wealthy émigré to Fez from Qayrawan in Tunisia; used her wealth to found the prestigious *Jami'ah al-Qarawiyyin* in the 9th century

Ferdinand II of Aragon: Catholic Monarch who, along with his wife Isabella, ethnically cleansed Spain of Jews and Muslims

Gerard of Cremona: one of the most prolific scholars working in the School of Translation in Toledo

Granada: Arabic *Gharnata*, the beautiful capital city of the Nasrids of southern Spain; the last Muslim kingdom on the Iberian Peninsula

Hadith (pl. Ahadith): Arabic for 'tradition', or the reported deed and saying of the Prophet ﷺ

Al-Hakam II: son of 'Abd al-Rahman III; one of the world's greatest bibliophiles; his palace library in Cordoba in the 10th century was likely the largest in the world

Hayy ibn Yaqdhan: Ibn Tufayl's short allegorical novel about an infant raised by a doe; book had a profound influence on Arabic, Persian and European literature

Ibn al-Ahmar, Muhammad: founder of the Nasrid dynasty of Granada in southern Spain

Ibn Khaldun: great Tunisian-born social historian; because of his monumental *Muqaddimah*, is considered to be the 'father of sociology'

Ibn Rushd: great Islamic scholar born in Cordoba; worked at court of the Almohads in Marrakesh and died there in 1198

Ibn Tashfin: greatest of the Almoravid Berber rulers; founded the city of Marrakesh in southern Morocco

Ibn Tufayl: great Andalusian Arab philosopher; wrote his famous novel, *Hayy ibn Yaqdhan*, at the Almohad court in Marrakesh

Ibn Ziyad, Tariq: famous Berber commander of the Muslim invasion of Spain in 711

Idris I (Idris ibn 'Abd Allah): relative of 'Ali رضي الله عنه ; founded the Idrisids, the first Arab dynasty of rulers in Morocco

Idris II: son of Idris I; founded the city of Fez in 810 on a site established by his father

Ijazah: Arabic for 'diploma' or 'degree'; the diploma granted to calligraphers or university students after the completion of their studies

Isabella I of Castile: one of the Catholic Monarchs; along with husband, Ferdinand II of Aragon, ethnically cleansed Spain of its Jewish, Muslim and Protestant populations

Jami'al-Kabir (Great Mosque of Cordoba): largest mosque ever built in Europe; used as a mosque for almost five hundred years; converted into a church in 1236 and desecrated in the 16th century when a Christian cathedral was erected in its centre

Jami'ah al-Qarawiyyin: great seat of learning founded in Fez in the mid-9th century by Fatimah al-Fihri; is the oldest degree-granting university in the world

Játiva: town lying to the south of Valencia, Spain; site of first paper mill in Europe

Jizyah: Arabic for 'poll tax'; paid by non-Muslims for protection by the Muslim state

Kalam Allah: Arabic for 'Word of God'; the Noble Qur'an is *Kalam Allah*; it is Allah's message for humanity revealed to Prophet Muhammad ﷺ

Al-Khwarizmi: a 9th century Muslim scholar renowned for his contributions to mathematics (namely, algebra); worked in the *Bayt al-Hikmah* in Baghdad

Kutubiyyah: the great mosque in Marrakesh, Morocco; completed in 1158 by the Almohad ruler 'Abd al-Mu'min

Madinah al-Zahra: palatial administrative capital of 'Abd al-Rahman III; built on outskirts of Cordoba in 10th century; destroyed by Berbers a century later

Madrasah: Arabic for 'religious college'

Maghrebī: distinctive calligraphic style of writing Arabic in Northwest Africa

Mansa Musa: 14th century ruler of Mali Empire; famous for his pilgrimage to Makkah during which he distributed, as charity, tons of gold

Marinids: Moroccan dynasty that succeeded the Almohads

Marrakesh: great city in southern Morocco founded by the Almoravid Berbers in the 11th century; skyline dominated by the minaret of beautiful Kutubiyyah Mosque

Moriscos: Spanish term for the Muslims forcibly baptized in 16th century Spain, but who, despite horrific persecution, maintained their belief in *Din al-Haqq al-Islam*

Mozarabs: Spanish Christians living under Muslim rule in Al-Andalus; many adopted Islamic dress and customs and knew Arabic

Muhaddith: Arabic for a scholar of *ahadith*

Mulhacén: the highest mountain in continental Spain; part of the Sierra Nevada range

Al-Muluk al-Tawa'if: Arabic for 'party' or 'factional' kings; two dozen independent states that replaced the united Spanish Umayyad caliphate

Muqaddimah: famous work of Ibn *Khaldun*; offers a unique view of world history

Mutakallim: Arabic for a scholar of *kalam*; a Muslim theologian

Nizam al-Mulk: influential Persian *wazir* of Great Seljuq state based in Isfahan; remembered for his book of advice to kings and his founding of a successful chain of orthodox Islamic colleges throughout western Asia

Nizamiyyah: colleges of *Sunni* learning established throughout Seljuq lands by Nizam al-Mulk

Oran *Fatwa*: the famous religious ruling issued in 1504 by a *mufti* in Oran (Algeria); specifically intended for the persecuted Muslims of Spain who had sought advice from the *'ulama*

Ptolemy: great astronomer, mathematician and geographer of Alexandria, Egypt; his works were translated from Greek into Arabic in the *Bayt al-Hikmah* in Baghdad and from Arabic into Latin at the Toledan Schools of Translation

Qalam: Arabic for 'pen'; the specially-prepared reed pen used by calligraphers

Qirtas: Arabic for 'papyrus' or 'page'; related to Latin *charta* (papyrus, paper, record)

Al-Razi: a famous Persian polymath; perhaps the greatest and most original of all Muslim physicians; many of his important works were translated from Arabic into Latin in the *Bayt al-Hikmah*

Reconquista: Spanish for 'reconquering'; the term used to describe the on-going Christian-Muslim confrontation in mediaeval Al-Andalus

Ribat: Arabic for 'religious fortress'; such forts were built as religious compounds by North African Berber dynasties such as the Almoravids

Rizmah: Arabic word for 'bundle' or 'bale'; English word 'ream' is derived from this Arabic word; a 'ream' can mean a large quantity of written material, or more precisely a bundle of 480 sheets of paper

Sabta (Ceuta)*:* a Spanish city on the Moroccan coast of North Africa; historically important during the early Muslim invasion of Spain; many *Moriscos* fleeing Spain arrived here first on their way to other parts of Morocco

Sahel: Arabic word meaning 'border' or 'coast'; the semi-arid region lying to the south of the Sahara Desert

Sankore University: the oldest seat of traditional learning in Timbuktu

Scot, Michael: a Scottish-born mathematician and scholar; learned Arabic in Toledo and successfully translated many Aristotelian works of Ibn Rushd from Arabic into Latin

Spanish Inquisition: a church tribunal founded by the Catholic Monarchs in 1478; aimed at preserving Catholic orthodoxy in Spain, but in so doing committed horrific crimes against the Jewish and Muslim populations; officially abolished in 1834

Suq al-Warraqin: the famous paper and booksellers market in caliphal Baghdad; inexpensive, locally-manufactured Baghadī paper fueled the 'information explosion' that led to literacy and the growth of Islamic civilization

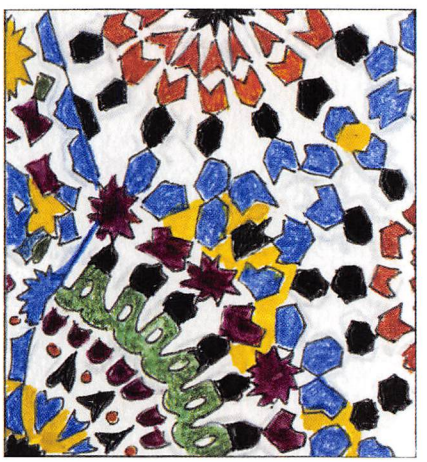
Talas, Battle of: famous confrontation between Chinese and Islamic empires in Central Asia in 751; Chinese captives divulged the secret of papermaking resulting in the spread of paper manufacturing throughout *Dar al-Islam*

Timbuktu: city in West African state of Mali; important centre of Islamic scholarship in 15th and 16th centuries; the contents of many valuable manuscript libraries there are being preserved

Tuaregs: Berber-speaking nomads of the Sahara and Sahel regions of North and West Africa

Al-Wadi al-Kabir: Arabic name for 'the great river', i.e. the 'Guadalquivir' that flows through Cordoba, Spain

Warraqun: Arabic for 'paper merchants', or 'copyists'; their role in promoting literacy and fueling the 'information explosion' is undeniable



Comprehension Questions

Now, you can test your knowledge of this story by answering the following questions.

Chapter One

1. What makes the Noble Qur'an unique among the religious books of the world?
2. When was the entire Qur'an first written down?
3. Who sent parchment copies of the Qur'an to the major capitals of *Dar al-Islam?*
4. What are three styles of Arabic calligraphy?
5. What was invented in 1450?
6. What was so special about the Qur'an that was printed in Venice?
7. When and where was paper first invented?
8. Briefly explain how Chinese paper was made from plant fibre.
9. When did the Islamic and Chinese empires first confront each other?
10. What was a result of the Muslim victory at Talas?
11. Who were captured after the Battle of Talas and what was their secret?
12. Where was the papermaking technology taken to by the 'Abbasids?
13. What is so special about paper as a writing surface?
14. What could Baghdad be proud of by the end of the 8th century?
15. What did a supply of inexpensive paper create?
16. What was another Chinese invention of the 8th century?

Chapter Two

1. What is still an indispensable commodity in our lives?
2. What are two momentous events in the history of mankind?
3. What did Baghdad's paper markets spark off?
4. What fosters man's intellectual development?
5. What have Muslims always been encouraged to do?
6. What was the city of Baghdad like in the 9th century?
7. What was the *Bayt al-Hikmah*?

8. What was the goal of this academy?
9. What was the *Suq al-Warraqin* and why was it so special?
10. Who were some of the first paper dealers in Baghdad?
11. When were *ahadith* first committed to writing?
12. When did the quality of paper improve?
13. What paper was the most popular in Baghdad?
14. What helped to increase literacy?
15. What were three kinds of new reading material that became available?
16. Who were the Sasanians and what did the 'Abbasids learn from them?
17. What did the *warraqun* supply to the 'Abbasid state?
18. What did some of Baghdad's book shops resemble?
19. What was Al-Khwarizmi's contribution to mathematics?
20. Who was Nizam al-Mulk and what did he establish?
21. How impractical was parchment for the mass production of books?
22. When was paper first manufactured in Cairo?
23. When and by whom was the Al-Azhar Mosque founded?
24. What two cities of Islamic learning in North Africa became papermaking centres?
25. Where and when was the first paper mill established in Europe?
26. Compare the new libraries of Al-Andalus with those found in the rest of Europe.
27. Why were some Europeans reluctant to use paper extensively?

Chapter Three

1. What city became the centre of papermaking in Europe?
2. Where did Spanish papermakers learn their trade?
3. Describe the process of making Játiva paper.
4. What were four advantages of paper over other materials?
5. What was radically changing Spanish society?
6. What had the Arabic language become?
7. Who were in great demand throughout Al-Andalus?

8. What was the name of the local style of handwriting used in writing the Noble Qur'an in Spain?
9. What is the highest art form in Islam?
10. What was the preferred tool of professional calligraphers?
11. What would apprentice calligraphers be taught?
12. What would help calligraphers hold their pens steady?
13. When would a calligrapher become officially recognized?
14. How was traditional black ink often made?
15. How were green, yellow, and blue inks made?
16. What are the four styles of *maghrebī* calligraphy?
17. What are several distinctive features of the *maghrebī* script?
18. Who was Ibn Khaldun and what famous book did he write?
19. According to Ibn Khaldun, why are most nomads illiterate?
20. According to Ibn Khaldun, how is writing learned in Al-Andalus?
21. What important event occurred in 711?
22. How were different colours of ink used in writing the Qur'an?
23. For how long did Muslims live on Spanish soil?
24. How many Qur'ans written in Al-Andalus are in existence today?

Chapter Four

1. When did the 'Golden Age' of Al-Andalus occur?
2. What transformed Spain into a virtual garden?
3. What were some differences between Cordoba and Paris in the 10th century?
4. What building was the heart and educational hub of Cordoba?
5. What was established in Cordoba for the first time?
6. What are we now recognizing in the 21st century?
7. What was the source of inspiration for the diverse culture of Muslim Spain?
8. How did the Muslim culture and language affect the local Spanish Christians?
9. Who was Alvaro and what did he lament?

10. What did the Christians, Jews, and Muslims of Al-Andalus embrace?
11. What did the Muslim rulers of Spain establish?
12. What did the caliphs of Al-Andalus take pride in?
13. What happened each year in Cordoba?
14. What invention made large libraries possible?
15. Who is considered to be the greatest bibliophile in Spanish history?
16. What was so special about Al-Hakam II's library?
17. What happened to some of Al-Hakam's books?
18. What important event happened in 929?
19. Where was *Madinah al-Zahra* constructed and what made it so famous?
20. What was the function of each of the city's terraces?
21. What was so special about one of 'Abd al-Rahman III's reception halls?
22. When and by whom was *Madinah al-Zahra* destroyed?
23. What heralded the slow demise of Anadalusian civilization?
24. What happened to the united Muslim state after 1031?
25. What happened to the handwritten Qur'an and who were the Banu Hud?

Chapter Five

1. What was the population of Cordoba in the 10th and 11th centuries?
2. How was Cordoba's famous markets divided?
3. How important was a supply of fresh water for the inhabitants of Cordoba?
4. Why were public baths destroyed throughout Spain during the reign of Phillip II?
5. How important was education in Muslim Spain?
6. Where were advanced studies taught?
7. How comprehensive was the curriculum at the Great Mosque of Cordoba?
8. How many mosques have survived from the past?

9. What happened to the Great Mosque in 1236?
10. What additions were made to the Great Mosque in the 16th century?
11. What does the Spanish term *convivencia* mean?
12. How did life in Al-Andalus change with the arrival of the Berber Almohads in the mid-12th century?
13. What does the Spanish term *reconquista* mean?
14. What were the conditions for Muslims like in Spain after 1031?
15. Under what circumstances did our Qur'an leave Cordoba for Toledo?

Chapter Six

1. What was Muslim Spain always actively involved in?
2. What was Toledo famous for?
3. Who were the Banu Hud and where did they live?
4. Who were the Mozarabs?
5. What was Al-Andaus a unique example of in the Middle Ages?
6. What did the minority Christians and Jews of Toledo pay?
7. For what purpose had the Spanish Inquisition been established?
8. What was the language used by the educated masses, regardless of religious affiliation?
9. How important were the libraries of Toledo in the late 11th century?
10. What did the Christian king Alfonso VI do when he captured Toledo in 1085?
11. When were the Jews and Muslims finally expelled from Toledo?
12. Who appreciated the great value of Toledo's libraries?
13. How international was the scope of the translation effort in Toledo?
14. How important were the Jews and Muslims in the translation process?
15. Who usually signed his name on the translation?
16. What did the close collaboration of scholars result in?
17. Who was the most important of all the Toledan translators?
18. What attracted Gerard of Cremona to Toledo?
19. After learning Arabic, what important book did he translate?
20. What other important work did he translate?

21. Who was another prolific translator and for what work is he remembered?
22. How advanced was medical practice in Muslim Spain?
23. What two important medical textbooks had Spanish Muslims been using?
24. What did Al-Andalus help in preserving?
25. How involved was the Banu Hud family in the intellectual life of Toledo?
26. What did the Banu Hud family do on Fridays and during Ramadhan?
27. What catastrophic event occurred in Granada in 1492?
28. What were the Muslims of Granada promised by the Spanish monarchs?
29. Why did so many Muslims migrate to Granada?
30. Why did the Banu Hud family leave Toledo and what did they take with them?

Chapter Seven

1. What remained the only independent Muslim kingdom in all of Spain?
2. What caused the population of Granada to dramatically increase?
3. What began in 1482?
4. Who were the Beni Nasr and from where had they sought help?
5. What weakened the Beni Nasr forces?
6. What one monument built by Spanish Muslims has survived in an almost perfect state of preservation?
7. What does the Alhambra Palace complex consist of?
8. What is the highest mountain in Spain and who is it named after?
9. Who was the founder of the Nasrid dynasty?
10. What is the Nasrid motto and what is its history?
11. Who led the final stage in the reconquering of Spain?
12. What was the condition of the Muslims of Granada in 1492?
13. According to the terms of surrender, what guarantees were to be given the Spanish Muslims?

14. What historic event occurred on the morning of January 2, 1492?
15. What did the Catholic Monarchs begin to do within a few years time?
16. Who was Cardinal Ximénes de Cisneros and what did he convince Queen Isabella to do?
17. What occurred in the Al-Baycin quarter of Granada in 1499?
18. What did Cisneros think about contracts that had been made with Muslims?
19. What were Ferdinand and Isabella convinced of?
20. What were Muslims forced to do?
21. What was the Spanish Inquisition and what was its aim?
22. Where did many wealthy Spanish Muslims go when they were forced to become Christians?
23. What was the name given to the forcibly-converted Muslims?
24. Why did the Spanish authorities convert or destroy mosques and *madrasahs*?
25. In what ways were Muslims humiliated by the Spanish authorities?
26. How did the *Moriscos* continue to live as Muslims?
27. Why was the Inquisition always monitoring the *Moriscos*?
28. What did Philip III decide to do at the start of the 17th century?
29. What was the goal of Ferdinand and Isabella?
30. What happened between the years 1609 and 1614?
31. Who brought our Qur'an from Toledo to Granada?
32. How old was the well-traveled Qur'an by this time?
33. Where was the well-travelled Qur'an kept?
34. What became more dangerous as each day passed?
35. Why did the *Moriscos* pray in their own homes?
36. Why was it difficult for some Muslim families to preserve the Arabic language?
37. Who played a crucial role in preserving the *Moriscos*' Muslim identity?
38. What happened to several members of the Banu Hud family?
39. At what times was the well-travelled Qur'an removed from the closet?
40. What were many Muslims in Granada deprived of?

Chapter Eight

1. Where was paper made, for the first time, in Al-Andalus?
2. What is a crypto-Muslim?
3. After the fall of Granada, how did Spain decide to deal with the differences in its society?
4. Who was Ximénes de Cisneros and what was he asked to do?
5. What idea did Cisneros have to speed up the process of conversions?
6. What happened to the religious books the Muslims handed over to Cisneros?
7. What Arabic texts were not burned?
8. What is biblioclasm?
9. What act of biblioclasm occurred in Mexico in 1562?
10. Where and when did the world witness the largest single act of book-burning in modern times?
11. What did the Serbs succeed in doing? How did they fail?
12. What was the end result of Cisneros' book-burning?
13. Despite the persecution they suffered, what did the *Moriscos* remember?
14. How was the text of the Noble Qur'an copied?
15. What was life like for the *Moriscos* under the Spanish Inquisition?
16. For what acts could *Moriscos* be punished?
17. Why were the bathing practices of *Moriscos* scrutinized?
18. What was usually assumed by the inquisitorial process?
19. What did the denial of guilt usually result in?
20. What did the Inquisition force some children to do?
21. What special education was given to the *Morisco* boys?
22. Who was supposed to replace parents as the teachers of their children?
23. From whom had *Moriscos* asked for help?
24. Why was no substantive help from abroad given to the *Moriscos*?
25. What happened to the mosques and *madrasahs* of Al-Andalus?
26. What was issued in 1504?
27. What did the *fatwa* offer?
28. What did the *mufti* admonish the *Moriscos* to do?
29. What would probably have been the advice of other Muslim scholars?
30. Why do we presume the *Fatwa* of Oran must have been popular?

31. What did the *Moriscos* revolt against?
32. Who helped the *Moriscos* in their revolt of 1568?
33. How did the revolt end?
34. What was clear towards the end of the 16th century?
35. What did some members of the Church still believe?
36. What did the king of Spain fear?
37. What five options were considered as a 'final solution' to the problem of the *Moriscos*?
38. Which option was finally chosen?
39. What last indignation did many *Morisco* families have to suffer when leaving Spain?
40. Who looked after the infant children taken from *Morisco* mothers?
41. Why did some *Moriscos* leave Spain willingly?
42. What was ironic about the final destination of some *Morisco* émigrés?
43. What happened in 1614?
44. What did the Banu Hud patriarch keep in his vest pocket?
45. What were neighbours doing at the city gates?
46. What happened to the well-traveled Qur'an?
47. How was the well-travelled Qur'an taken out of Spain?
48. How painful was it for some *Moriscos* to leave Spain?

Chapter Nine

1. What lesson had the Catholic Monarchs failed to learn?
2. What had been the result of *convivencia*?
3. What was the spoken language of the majority of Spanish Muslims in the late 15th century?
4. How did *Moriscos* keep alive their Islamic heritage?
5. What is the Arabic origin of the term *aljamiado*?
6. What topics were discussed in *aljamiado* texts?
7. When were most of the *aljamiado* texts written?
8. Where were *aljamiado* texts written?

9. What accounts are found in *aljamiado* literature?
10. What was so special about the Qur'ans that were handwritten during this period?
11. How would *Moriscos* preserve their *aljamiado* books?
12. When and where were many *aljamiado* texts found?
13. How important was the 'home' to *Moriscos*?
14. What was the name of two very popular *aljamiado* books?
15. What was the purpose of the *Breviario Sunni*?
16. After 1614, what was Spain's economy like?
17. What did the exiled *Moriscos* never forget?
18. When did the Spanish Inquisition finally cease its operations?
19. When was Catholicism dropped as Spain's state religion?
20. What happened to the well-travelled Qur'an?

Chapter Ten

1. What dilemma was posed for the Spanish authorities?
2. Where were some *Moriscos* sent?
3. Where did most *Moriscos* choose as their destination?
4. Where did the Banu Hud board a ship and where did they sail to?
5. What historical event occurred at *Sabta* (Ceuta)?
6. What did many North Africans think about exiled *Moriscos*?
7. How many Banu Hud family members left Spain?
8. Where did the Banu Hud family want to settle and how could they make a new life for themselves there?
9. What was encouraged and respected in Muslim Spain?
10. Who were attracted to the *madrasahs* and mosques of Al-Andalus?
11. Where did the three Banu Hud boys want to study?
12. What has Islam always encouraged?
13. How does one truly become a Muslim?
14. What did North African *madrasahs* resemble?
15. What enabled Muslims to succeed and develop the best centres of learning the world had ever seen?

16. When and where was the great Qarawiyyin Mosque/University established?
17. What is so special about the Qarawiyyin Mosque?
18. Who was Fatimah al-Fihri and why was she so important?
19. How did the Qarawiyyin resemble the translation schools of Toledo?
20. How comprehensive was the Qarawiyyin curriculum?
21. What connections were there between the Qarawiyyin and Cordoba?
22. What was one important difference between the Qarawiyyin and European universities?
23. What was education like in the Qarawiyyin Mosque?
24. What was special about the muezzin of the Qarawiyyin Mosque?
25. What is the origin of the term 'academic circle'?
26. In what section of Fez did the Banu Hud family settle?
27. Where was the well-travelled Qur'an kept?

Chapter Eleven

1. What happened to the two Banu Hud boys?
2. What were three examples of customs that the *Moriscos* had preserved from Al-Andalus?
3. How old was the well-travelled Qur'an?
4. Who would read the well-travelled Qur'an during the day?
5. Who was 'Uqba ibn Nafi' and what did he do when he reached the Atlantic coast of Morocco?
6. Who founded the first Arab kingdom in Northwest Africa?
7. What important role did the Idrisid dynasty play?
8. Who founded the city of Fez?
9. What was the first Berber dynasty to establish an empire in Morocco?
10. Where did this Berber dynasty originate?
11. Who was the Almoravid leader and what capital city did he found?
12. What did the Almoravids successfully do for the first time?
13. What was the second Berber dynasty to establish an empire in Morocco?

14. Who were two famous scholars from Al-Andalus who worked at the court of the Almohad caliph?
15. What does the city of Marrakesh look like?
16. What important building dominates the city's skyline?
17. Why was the mosque called the 'Kutubiyyah'?
18. Who established the Nizamiyyah *madrasahs*?
19. Where did the Almoravids come from?
20. Where and when was the first Moroccan *madrasah* established?
21. What is one reason why Moroccan *madrasahs* are so small?
22. What was the layout of a Moroccan *madrasah* like?
23. What is the most important feature of the Moroccan *madrasah*?
24. What did Moroccan artisans create?
25. Where did the two Banu Hud boys receive their education?
26. What did Harun become and where was he asked to teach?
27. Where did most educated *Morisco* émigrés prefer to settle when arriving in Morocco?
28. Who welcomed Harun when he reached Marrakesh?
29. What did Harun bring with him to Marrakesh?
30. What would Harun do on special days?

Chapter Twelve

1. What did Harun become at the 'Ali bin Yusuf *Madrasah*?
2. From where did the 'Ali bin Yusuf *Madrasah* students come?
3. Where did two of Harun's best students come from?
4. How far away was Timbuktu from Marrakesh?
5. Why did the two brothers want to return to Timbuktu?
6. Where was Harun invited?
7. How did Harun and his students travel to Timbuktu?
8. What did the Tuareg nomads transport along the Sahara trade routes?
9. Why did the journey prove rewarding?
10. Why did Harun take the well-travelled Qur'an with him?
11. How did Harun recite verses from the Noble Qur'an?

12. What area of southern Morocco is full of picturesque Berber villages?
13. Who had written the old rock inscriptions?
14. When was this unique alphabetic writing used?
15. What were conditions like after leaving the last Berber settlement?
16. When did the camel caravan finally reach Timbuktu?
17. Why had the journey been worth it?
18. What made Timbuktu unique?
19. When did Islam first arrive in Timbuktu?
20. When did Arabic become the lingua franca in this part of Africa?
21. What did Timbuktu become?
22. How important are the private libraries in Timbuktu today?
23. How important were Timbuktu's book markets?
24. What enabled individuals to build up such large private libraries?
25. What threatened the libraries in the 19th century?
26. Where did some notable families hide their manuscript collections?
27. What are the libraries of Timbuktu a testament to?
28. What type of traditional architecture is found in Timbuktu?
29. What is a unique feature of West African earth architecture?
30. What is the oldest centre of Islamic learning in Timbuktu?
31. How competent were the scholars at the Sankore University?
32. What is the West African proverb that immortalizes the role of Timbuktu as a cultural capital?
33. Who founded the Sankore University?
34. What did Harun marvel at?
35. What books did Harun want to take back to Marrakesh?
36. What made the final evening in Timbuktu a memorable one for Harun?
37. What was Harun asked to do after dinner?
38. What did Harun proceed to do?

Chapter Thirteen

1. What did Harun particularly like about the dinner party?
2. What did the community of scholars offer Harun?
3. Why did Harun look forward to returning to Marrakesh?
4. What *ayah* did Harun read before falling asleep?
5. What did Harun usually do every morning?
6. What did Harun's two students notice?
7. What had happened to Harun in his sleep?
8. What prayer did the two students recite in unison?
9. Where was Harun buried?
10. What had happened in 1610?
11. What had Harun seen in his long life?
12. What was the one thing that had remained constant in Harun's life?
13. What guided Harun in his life?
14. What is the real message of the Qur'an?
15. What survived in the hearts of hundreds of thousands of Spanish Muslims?
16. What books were banned in 16th century Spain?
17. Under these difficult circumstances, how did the *Moriscos* physically preserve the Noble Qur'an?
18. How were some copies of the Noble Qur'an eventually taken out of Spain?
19. In what *ayah* has Allah guaranteed the preservation of *Kalam Allah*?
20. What happened to the well-travelled Qur'an after Harun's death?
21. What happened to Timbuktu in the following centuries?
22. What happened to the many great libraries and book markets?
23. Where were thousands of handwritten manuscripts hidden?
24. What happened in the 20th century?
25. What is happening to many of the manuscripts today?
26. What is being restored?
27. Where had the well-travelled Qur'an lay hidden?
28. When was the story of the well-travelled Qur'an revealed to the world?

29. What was the key to understanding the precious story of the well-travelled Qur'an?
30. What did Harun's father write on the special page?
31. What language had Harun's father used?
32. What did Harun write on the secret page?
33. What was so special about the prayer Harun's father wrote?
34. What did Harun's father hope would happen to the well-travelled Qur'an?
35. What is so remarkable about this story?

The Chinese were also the first to invent paper money in the 8th century CE.
It was initially called 'flying money' because of its light weight.

A magnificent example of Andalusian *thuluth* calligraphy on the wall tiles of the Bu-Inaniyyah *Madrasah* in Fez, Morocco. This *madrasah* was built by the Beni Marin sultan, Abu Inan, in the middle of the 14th century. This inscription reads *al-Hamdu li-Llâh alledhī,* 'Praise be to Allah who …'